We Love Reading: Young Men and Fathers
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About We Love Reading

We Love Reading is a program that aims to changing mindset to create change makers through the love of reading. The program was founded in 2006 by Dr. Rana Dajani in Jordan and has spread to 56 countries, where thousands of We Love Reading libraries have been established.

Book Development

We Love Reading has published 32 children’s illustrated storybooks designed for readers between ages 4-10. The storybooks were developed according to set criteria and methodology, and produced in collaboration with our strategic partners and local writers, illustrators, and designers.

Research

We Love Reading, with top research institutions actively conducts rigorous, scientific research on our read-aloud program to assess its effectiveness and to continuously improve our approach, helping us better serve our beneficiaries.
Dr. Rana Dajani

The percentage of men trained as WLR storytellers is smaller than the percentage of women. However, those few young men are tapping into unknown territories and discovering things that seem unusual in the eyes of society and outside their own comfort zones.

The young men trained in Za’atari have proved to be very efficient and capable. Their activity sprung forth from their sense of responsibility towards the home that they left and their belief that children were the hope to rebuild Syria. Before volunteering with WLR, some of them were involved in youth committees and chose to incorporate WLR in their programs.

Young Jordanian men trained in Irbid in northern Jordan were so active and were the reason several more libraries opened in Irbid. Hamzeh and Waseem lead a youth society in the campus of their university, they are so active and always on the go that by merely training two young men from a city, they were able to train 15 of their friends (males and females) how to read aloud and open libraries in their neighborhoods.

Two young Jordanian men trained in Karak city in the southern part of Jordan went beyond the WLR model to start a cultural society that is being the most active society in the city where they hold second-hand book fairs, do campaigns to clean and beautify the city and work on reserving monuments in the area.

Those young men are not individuals working from their ivory tower, for almost all of them have trained siblings and parents how to read aloud and so the WLR library is now a family project.

Such young men are role models for younger boys and are helping redefining masculinity away from violence and closer to the sense of responsibility towards the society. Our model is helping them tap into creative talents that some of them did not know they had and are dealing with kids, a role that has been for so long reserved only for women. They come up with more innovative solutions either in managing their reading sessions or in organizing big events and leading societies that serve entire cities.
Study on We Love Reading Embassadors Who are Fathers

In 2019, WLR started working with a graduate student, Ms. Madina Olomi, from Lund University, on a study with the purpose of examining Jordan’s We Love Reading father ambassadors’ perceptions of and involvement in reading with their young children (ages 3-6).

More specifically, the research aims to understand WLR fathers’ perceptions of how reading with their young children is affected by and has affected other aspects within their homes, extended families, neighborhoods, and communities. The aim of this research is to contribute a new perspective to the existing literature on early childhood education and development and storybook reading at home, while also adding to the much-needed research on fathers’ involvement in early childhood education and development. A number of We Love Reading Ambassadors who are either Jordanian or Syrian refugees who reside in Jordan were interviewed as part of the study.

Some main findings were:

Prior to their participation in the WLR training:
73 percent of WLR father ambassadors in Jordan felt reading was the mother’s responsibility. Only 33 percent of participants had engaged in reading with their children prior to training with WLR.

As a result of the training:
87 percent of participants felt that reading should be a shared responsibility between parents. All participants stated that they currently read with their children, although the length and frequency differed amongst them.

Participants’ perceptions on how reading affected their environments:
93 percent of participants stated they have a closer relationship with their children after they began reading with them.
Increase in children reading and requesting to be read to.
73 percent of participants reported that they began reading with children other than their own after their participation in the WLR training.
Reading with children reinforced their role within the community.
Stories of We Love Reading Ambassadors: Young men and Fathers
Wasfi Al Sabrat

We Love Reading Ambassador Wasfi Al Sabrat is a 47-year-old (Jordanian) father from Sahab. Before his training, Mr. Al Sabrat mentioned that he did not read very often with his children, but he felt this increased after his training with We Love Reading. According to Mr. Al Sabrat, a main motivation for him to read was his children’s encouragement and requests for him to read.

“They would come to me and ask oh dad or uncle we want you to read us a story. I mean even if one was busy with something, he would leave it and make thirty minutes of his time for them.”

Mr. Al Sabrat also stated that reading has become a family affair that is part of his family’s gatherings every Friday.

“We gather on Fridays with my children, my siblings’ children, the grandchildren and during those days we make time to read. I even got my brothers involved in reading with the children.”

When asked if he felt it was important for programs like We Love Reading to train more men and fathers to read with their children, Mr. Al Sabrat insisted that it was as most men are hesitant to read or feel shy when reading stories with children.

“But that shyness goes away after being trained like through WLR. There became this understanding. Reading to children became nice and you learn how to connect to the children and get them to enjoy reading more.”
Mr. Al Sabrat also mentioned there were many benefits for fathers as well. According to Mr. Al Sabrat, when fathers read with their children, they understand their children more, their personalities, the things they like, and their imagination. Fathers also help in developing their children’s character. Along with getting to know their children more, Mr. Al Sabrat said that fathers also build a closer bond with their children when they read with them.

“Children are with the mothers most of the time. So, there became an opportunity for you to sit with your children. Yes, it is reading and at times you don’t exceed more than thirty minutes, but it’s nice. I mean there is harmony, there is closeness.”

We thank Mr. Wasfi Al Sabrat for sharing his experience and opinion on how training with We Love Reading has influenced his involvement in reading with his children. Mr. Wasfi’s insight was extremely insightful and we hope.
Musab Muhammad Al Ali

25-years-old We Love Reading Ambassador Musab Al Ali is a father of 2 children that spends his free time volunteering. Mr. Al Ali spoke to us about how, prior to his training with We Love Reading, he felt too shy and somewhat scared to read to children. Mr. Al Ali stated during the time he was training with We Love Reading he practiced reading with nearly 200 children, and this made him feel more confident and at ease when reading with children.

Mr. Al Ali also discussed how reading to children helped reinforce his role within the community. During his time volunteering, Mr. Al Ali became known to the children in the organization and they would introduce him as their “storyteller Musab.” Mr. Al Ali mentioned that this role, that was created through his involvement in reading with the children, made him “a good person in their live” and the children even began interacting better with one another as a result of the example he set.

“they had this person treating them well and when they would argue I would speak with them and they started being like me. Imitating me.”

Mr. Al Ali reminisced on his opinion that reading was not something that young children were able to engage in. Now, Mr. Al Ali believes that any child, regardless of their age, enjoys and benefits from being read to.

According to Mr. Al Ali, reading has given him the opportunity to have an activity in which he can connect with his two daughters and that because of these interactions he now feels a closer bond to them.
Mr. Al Ali also discussed how he began to feel more responsible for reading with his children and that it was not just his wife’s responsibility. Mr. Al Ali even claims that sometimes his method of reading comes out nicer than his wife's, which makes him want to be more involved in reading to his daughters.

“There was something for me to do with them. Children get bored and now that I have this thing to do with them, I started liking them more honestly”
We Love Reading Ambassador Jameel Al Hajaj is a 45-year-old father living in Tafileh. Mr. Al Hajaj mentioned that before he trained with, We Love Reading he did not really care for reading. He claimed that as a provider his main focus is in relation to work so he did not really pay attention much to things like reading. Mr. Al Hajaj stated that his involvement in reading changed after the We Love Reading training as he began to notice that his children really enjoyed the time they spent reading with him and would be more interested when reading with him rather than anyone else.

According to Mr. Al Hajaj, it is necessary to have initiatives that involve fathers in the act of reading with their children.

“It is necessary for it to continue. And it is necessary that people wake up and go back to even in the religion and how the Prophet (pbuh) was told to read even though he didn’t know how to read or write. Imagine reading has a place. It has a place in life, in social relations. Now I hope that this program returns and continues because most people, unfortunately, have become lazy especially when it comes to education.”

Mr. Al Hajaj also spoke about the books he received from the We Love Reading program. He believed that these stories created a sense of joy and excitement for children that was missing in the stories they received from school. Mr. Al Hajaj felt that the stories children received from school were constraining but the stories We Love Reading provided, encouraged children to read and they became curious to know how stories ended.
Another interesting element that Mr. Al Hajaj spoke about was his children requesting him to read with them rather than requesting technologies such as tablet, computers, or telephones. Mr. Al Hajaj stated that

“When you take the time to read with them, you feel like even your child starts to enjoy you more. And enjoy sitting with you and comes to you asking for you to read to him and to be close to you. But before I mean in the beginning, I remember that my child every time I would get home, he would ask me for my phone and to connect the internet for him. And his whole time was spent on the iPad, computer, or telephone.”

When asked who he felt bore the responsibility for reading to children, Mr. Al Hajaj felt that culture and norms played an important role in placing the responsibility for reading on mothers. He believes that it is necessary for this view to change as it places a large burden on women, especially for those that work outside the home. This change in view has begun in Mr. Al Hajaj’s home as he now takes on more responsibility in reading with his children.
Nedal Ahmoud Al Zedaneen

42-year-old We Love Reading Ambassador Nedal Al Zedaneen is an 18-year-old at heart that loves to read with children and inspire a love for reading within his community. An Amman native, Mr. Al Zedaneen has an organization that works to inspire and motivate people towards education.

Mr. Al Zedaneen mentioned that before he trained with We Love Reading he did not really read with his children but after the training he began to read with them and also with other children in his family. He felt that the We Love Reading training taught him how to create a habit of reading within children and encourage reading in people.

Mr. Al Zedaneen also stated that as a result of his involvement in reading with the children in his family, his siblings became motivated to read with children as well.

“They began to even gather the children themselves. It stayed with us, between my siblings, until now. Currently we began a collection that talks about the Prophet’s story. We read to them from the Prophet’s story.”

This enthusiasm did not stop with Mr. Al Zedaneen’s siblings, it reached his children as well. Mr. Al Zedaneen spoke about his 12-year-old daughter and her love for reading that was developed through his involvement in reading with her.
“Every day she has to get a new book from the school library. Daily. Even her classmates get jealous of her, saying ‘why does she take books and we do not?’ She tells them it is because she reads them. And actually, she spends 2 hours and finishes the entire story.”

Mr. Al Zedaneen has even encouraged his wife to learn to read. He mentioned that his wife did not have the opportunity to learn to read when she was younger but after their marriage she began to read and is now focused on reading and memorizing the Quran.
Abdullah Hamedan Al Rajaa

Abdullah Al Rajaa is a 43-year-old We Love Reading Ambassador and librarian living in Mafraq that believes it is necessary for his children to read. Mr. Al Rajaa was involved in reading with his children prior to his training with We Love Reading but felt that his method of reading improved as a result of the training. He feels that the way he reads now encourages children to read whereas they previously may have felt somewhat bored.

Mr. Al Rajaa mentioned that he was able to carry out a successful gathering with about 15 children in his neighborhood to read some of the stories he received from the We Love Reading training. He also stated that he continues to read regularly with his children and that his children began to enjoy books and reading a lot more after his training with We Love Reading.

“They started themselves, I mean, bring me a book now and say, ‘dad read us this story’ and if we read that story, they would say to read it again.”

According to Mr. Al Rajaa, his children are now so enthusiastic to read that they began to take stories with them when they left the house.
“We take books with us even when we go out on errands, we take in the car with us. And my daughter reads to her brother or they ask me about certain words sometimes, ‘dad what does this word mean.’”

Mr. Al Rajaa also spoke about the appreciation he had for the stories that he received from the We Love Reading program, and how the stories not only reached his children but many children in his community. He feels that children benefit from these stories as they give meaning to characteristics such as safety, ethics, friendship, cooperation, loyalty, integrity, and fairness. Mr. Al Rajaa believes that these concepts enter children’s in a new way through the stories that he reads with them.