We Love Reading; The first circle of bliss.
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 60 countries, where thousands of We Love Reading libraries have been established. The program constitutes training local women, men, and youth to hold read aloud session for children in their neighborhoods to foster the love of reading. The training can be taken face-to-face or online through our training portal which is being translated into ten different languages.

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.

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.
Letter from the Founder

Dr. Rana Dajani

Dear Readers,

When I started reading aloud to the children in my neighborhood it was the eyes of the children that were food to my soul that kept me going. It was their eagerness and enthusiasm and excitement that was a testimonial that reading aloud can make a difference. Their eyes would light up and have a strange sparkle. They would beg for more and more.

The Reading aloud was planting a seed in their souls that took root and flourished changing their mindsets to become who they are today. I believed that reading aloud would make a difference on the long run even if others did not. The children grew up to be special as the stories you will read will show. I imagine that years from now that it will be said that children growing up in a certain neighborhood were different no one knows why… but if we go back we find out that they were part of we love reading … they were read aloud to.. They are the next generation of change-makers… they are carrying the torch forward… they are the butterflies of the future I am proud to have been part of their lives….. We have to believe… That is all.

Rana Dajani
How it all started

On a Saturday morning in February 2006, Dr. Rana Dajani, the mother of four carried a bag of children’s books across the road to her local mosque in Amman, Jordan. She donned a traditional folklore dress and a silly hat, and spent an hour reading stories to two dozen children gathered at her feet.

During Friday prayers the following week, her imam advertised her story time to the congregation. Fifty children showed up for the second event. With a small grant from the mosque, as well as some personal savings, Dajani bought a collection of books for her first library. She acted out the stories in costume and with puppets, and read three books before offering to lend each child a book to take home. Some of them had never had a children’s book in their home. “The way the kids look at you, the way you feel their eyes sparkle as they’re listening to the story, it makes you forget everything, and you just say, ‘Oh my God, this is worth it,’” Dajani says. Thus began We Love Reading (WLR), a global program that guides women volunteers through the process of forming and hosting weekly read-aloud circles for children in their neighborhood’s public spaces.¹

This magazine followed some of the children who attended the very first sessions to see what impact read-aloud sessions had on their lives.

¹ 1,001 Story Times, Corey Binns, Stanford Social Innovations, Fall 2017
Stories of We Love Reading Ambassadors; The first circle of bliss.
Whenever I felt the need to escape the woes of the outside world or to simply view life from a different perspective, I would always find comfort when I immerse myself between the pages of a book. It provided utter bliss and joy for me to forget who I was for a bit and live as someone else; a wandering adventurer, a professional assassin or even as another angst teenage who may be facing bigger issues than those I thought I had.

But all of that wouldn’t have been possible had those small sparks of interest in reading not been ignited into a blaze of passion, and that all started in a small neighborhood mosque; where a storyteller, wearing colorful outfits and a hat you can only see on a showman of sort, decided to show a group of skeptical yet intrigued looking kids what it’s like to read for fun and to find comfort in a book. None of us back then would even imagine that we would set precedent to something that would help so many other children and bring a change to communities all over the world. And while not all may grow to be the same eager bookworm I grew up to be, I am sure that they would be thinking back fondly of those Saturday afternoons and of an adult who cared about what children had to say and bring to their surroundings.

It wasn’t just reading that we gained from it after all, it was the feeling of accomplishment every time we finished a story, and the new friendships we made, and the sense of responsibility when we were handed our next story to borrow and return in the same shape for others to be able to read too(and it didn’t hurt that we were offered some treats with every book either). For that, and for ever more, I was and will forever be grateful to be a part of this delightful experience, and I am even more grateful for the chance to share my story with others.

But since I’m not the only one who attended those sessions, I set on a journey to find some of my fellow attendees who would offer their perspective on the matter. As hard as it was to contact them, I was delighted to reconnect with them and hear about what they remember about our little sessions.
Ro’aa Abbas Aljalodi

We Love Reading Ambassador Ro’aa Abbas Aljalodi is a 17 year old reader and aspiring writer who was eager to tell me about her recollection of the hakawatii (storyteller) and how that left an impact in her life. Ro’aa stated that the hakawatii’s stories transported her to this imaginary world filled with characters that were relatable and inspiring and planted seeds of ideas and values using entertaining methods that left an impression and helped build our character.

Even regardless of how they helped enhance our language and writing abilities she felt that it played a great role in improving our social and interactive side and planted positive thoughts that helped build a balanced and interesting personality.

I found that even now Ro’aa believes that the hakawatii helped her understand that books are a whole realm which consists of everything a mind could conjure, and it deals with various ideas and beliefs which may or may not suit your surroundings. Therefore, she is certain that we have to search for the right book, but we will find books that will be an asset along the way in a time where guidance is most needed, and in that realm she found people and characters that motivated her to be like them and reach for success no matter what held them back.
Enas Aldassan

Enas Aldassan is 20 year old, another attendee, on the other hand, painted a rather vivid picture of how she remembered the hakawatii to be; she recalled how the hakawatii’s kind smile never faltered in front of us and how she showed genuine interest in our thoughts and wanted us to reenact the stories with her as if we were in a theatre.

She also recalled how she used puppets to tell the stories sometimes and change the tone of her voice when needed, and how she would use elaborate movements to capture our attention and hang onto her every word. Enas expressed that was already interested in books but, for an eight six year old or so at that time, that felt like an otherworldly experience unlike any she’s ever had before.

She, like me, is a twenty year old university student now, but she has yet to forget those days twelve years ago and wishes she could go back and listen to the hakawatii’s stories again. Enas firmly believes that we love reading was a big part of her love for reading now and her eagerness for exploring the unknown regardless of the genre, it feels like an inseparable piece of her heart now.
Rawn bassam Al btoush

Rawn bassam Al btoush, is an athletic 15 year old who loves to sing, was yet another one of those who attended the sessions with her brother. She recalls taking a story home after every session and reading it with her brother to discuss it next time.

She remembers the hakawatii’s stories to be fun and easy to love for those who wanted motivation to read and to feel the joy of it. It filled her time during the vacation and gave her more patience to read for longer periods of time. And while she didn’t get into reading for a long time after, she managed to get back to it recently and love it like she did with the hakawatii.

It may seem as if we love reading is now this big world renowned organization that went on to do great things, but to us then, it was our most awaited circle of bliss on an otherwise wasted Saturday and with another adventure to explore.