2012 Cumulative report
**We Love Reading**

**Vision**
A society that loves to read at any time and place

**Motto**
A library in every neighborhood

**Mission**
WLR exists to positively impact women and children throughout Jordan and the Arab world creating change agents empowered women community leaders and a generation of children that love, enjoy and respect books through the establishment of a library in every neighborhood in the Arab world by empowering women in a role as a community leaders (change agents) through training them how age how to set up and run the model which includes how to read out loud to the children 4-10 years old in a public place, reading material that is appropriate for their And organizing these women in a network for sustainability, thereby actively encouraging each community to respect and acknowledge the leadership roles of the women in the society and to share in the experience of reading, and creating a life-long enthusiasm for each child to read and acquire knowledge specifically girls so that they can build a better social and economic security and improve their lives

**Core values**
Our core values are integrity, equality and respect for all human beings
WLR has come a long way since its creation in 2006. WLR has begun to fulfil its mission of positively impacting women and children throughout Jordan and the Arab world, by creating change agents, empowered women, community leaders and a generation of children that love, enjoy and respect books.

WLR has spread beyond the Arab world to Thailand, Azerbaijan, Uganda and Mexico. An accomplishment we dreamt of but did not except to achieve within this short period. This proves the replicability and feasiblity of the WLR model. However, we still have a long way to go. Our main challenge is sustaining our libraries. This can be achieved by creating a network of communication between the women readers. We hope to achieve this by obtaining funding to create a mobile network between the women.

WLR has been able to plant ownership in women readers in their neighbourhood mosques where men have become to respect the leadership role of the women readers. This will lead to empowering women as leaders in their community to instigate change and play a prominent role in decision making within the community because of their increased knowledge and wisdom gained from reading and their leadership role. This is very important and comes at the right time in light of the changes in the Arab world and the advent of the Arab spring. WLR will ride the tide of change and take the Arab world to a new world.

WLR is proud of the women readers. They are the pillars of the community on whom WLR is based.

Director

Rana Dajani
The problem
Women and girls have been marginalized, victimized and ignored. Advances in their lives and status has been slow and difficult. Poverty, politics, culture and conflict have played a mitigating role against empowerment of women and growth of opportunities. There are many programs that address women issues in an effort to empower women and alleviate their situation. An area that has not been explored that will have a tremendous impact both on the short and long term on building greater social and economic security and improving the lives of women is the importance of reading among women and girls. Lack of reading for pleasure result in no stimulation of creativity, skill are narrow and limited. Inability to tap into the knowledge society. Thus the status quo remains fixed. Reading is essential to the development of a child's personality, imagination, brain and communication skills. Children must learn to love and enjoy reading to reap its benefits. Children of the Arab world and Jordan in particular are not readers for many reasons. A recent survey from Arabia news estimated that the number of pages read in the Middle East is half a page a year while for the USA it is 11 books a year. Estimations based on the UNESCO reports of 1991 and 2005 and the US working paper for the G8 summit in 2004, say that an Arab reader on average reads 6 minutes per year and that Arab countries' output of books represents just 1.1% of the world total while the Arab population represents around 5% of the world population. My idea is planting the love of reading in children at an early age. Research has shown that in order to plant the love of reading one must read aloud to the child from an early age. The type of reading we are fostering is not reading for education, or reading for religious purposes. Our goal is planting the love of reading for pleasure. That is the type of reading that stays with the individual for life. That is what transforms the individual into a responsible citizen who can make a difference in her community who know that there is another way who does not succumb to the status quo but looks beyond and strives to achieve a better world for herself and her family and her country. The problem is that children nor adults read for pleasure. Girls grow up in an environment that is poor in ideas, stunted in creativity, narrow in skills resulting in a limited world view and lack of ability to tap into knowledge based resources. Thus, instead of these girls growing up into women who become change makers, forces of change that develop their communities through their leadership roles into a better society, they grow up into women without change in the status quo. The result is poverty, injustice, abuse and inequity whose victims are in the majority women and girls. A literate society is essential for economic development and social integration. The practice of reading and writing enables a culture to identify its past while it envisions its future. The information age places a premium on the generation and dissemination of knowledge and information. And the ability to use texts in all its diverse formats is essential. Local customs, local wisdom and oral traditions must remain valued, of course. But, individuals and communities that do not value and practice high levels of reading and writing on a wide scale are inevitably at risk of becoming the victims rather than the masters of the global knowledge society. Reason that children or adults do not read are multiple such as lack of books, no role models, TV, internet. However, major reason as research has shown is lack of being read to i.e. lack of the experience. Many programs that have attempted to solve the problem by providing books alone. The reason the programs above and others have failed is because they do not focus on the experience of reading aloud. When you help a man you don’t give him fish you teach him how to fish.
Most programs in the east focus on the materialist provide the book that will solve the problem, in the west the focus is always in the individual, capacity building invest in the human the rest will come. That is the approach we have used in our model. We focus on the experience because that is how you build an individual and a nation. Read aloud as a way to plant the love of reading in the east is overlooked by the west because it is a no brainer and in the east it does not even exist. So it is lost in translation.

Our model

We have developed a model which will serve as guide to setting up new community libraries in the region. The basic process for developing the program in a community includes:
1. Recruit women from the local community who are responsible, passionate and dedicated to empower them to set up and run the libraries by training them to assume a leadership role in their communities.
2. Identify a central location that is easily accessible by neighborhood children, such as a mosque or community center.
3. Secure books for the library through donations from individuals or organizations. There can be as few or many books as can be easily gathered.
4. Have a storytelling session every other weekend.
5. Give out the books to the children to read at home. Sustainability is built into our business model through capacity building at the level of the local citizen.
By providing program development training to local women and girls we are instilling them with the confidence and skills they need to successfully expand WLR into their own local neighborhoods with minimal guidance and few resources. The women engage as leaders with their communities and because they are required to pay it forward i.e. to train another woman to become a leader there is a domino effect. Increasing the impact of the program logarithmically. In a way substituting the role of the parents in reading to their children. Overall, the model is easily replicable, particularly in rural areas, as the only requirements are a trained reader, a collection of children's books, a comfortable location, and some enthusiastic young participants. The idea has a domino effect because the ladies we train are asked to pay it forward by training another lady and so on.

**Reading and Empathy**

Children develop the values they will hold later in life during the early years. Childrens books and activities are important ways for children to learn values. To do that we set up role models and relative examples in a way that a child can see herself in that role and to learn the consequences of good and bad behaviour extrapolating on the child's imagination. These books will be from the child's own culture and background, hence relative and effective. Children will start building positive attitudes and learn best
practices concerning love and forgiveness from the books they listen to and the activities they perform. The children's behaviour will be transmitted to the parents and community. Research has shown that reading increases empathy. Keith Oatley, a professor in the department of human development and applied psychology at the University of Toronto: "I think the reason fiction but not non-fiction has the effect of improving empathy is because fiction is primarily about selves interacting with other selves in the social world," said Oatley. "The subject matter of fiction is constantly about why she did this, or if that's the case what should he do now, and so on. With fiction we enter into a world in which this way of thinking predominates. We can think about it in terms of the psychological concept of expertise. If I read fiction, this kind of social thinking is what I get better at. If I read genetics or astronomy, I get more expert at genetics or astronomy. In fiction, also, we are able to understand characters' actions from their interior point of view, by entering into their situations and minds, rather than the more exterior view of them that we usually have. And it turns out that psychologically there is a big difference between these two points of view. We usually take the exterior view of others, but that's too limited."
History

I am an assistant professor at the Hashemite university in Jordan. I lived in the US for 5 years with my children. We had worked in the states with the public library in our town extensively. When we came back to our country (Jordan), we realised that there are no libraries in Jordan. So we took it upon ourselves to make our own library. We developed a project with a long term goal of "a library in every neighbourhood" similar to what is present in the States. Our project started with a pilot project in our own neighbourhood. We first needed a place so we figured that every neighbourhood had a mosque so the place was secured. Then we got some charity money and went around the bookstores looking for books in Arabic for children that were appealing in terms of context, illustrations and language. The books were chosen on purpose not to contain any religious inclinations. To our surprise we found a good number (I can give you names of authors later). So the bookstores gave us gracious discounts and we bought around 100 books. We announced in the Friday's prayers that their will be a storytelling session the following day on Saturday for one hour in the morning for children (both genders) from 4 to 9 years old (no need for adult supervision). I had obtained a number of costumes (clown, old woman etc.) and a number of puppets. Around 25 children showed up the next day. We read 3 stories using animations and acting (we had a great time). Then we handed out all the books we had bought. The children were supposed to take the books home and read them every night or to be read to by a parent every night until the next storytelling session which was once every two weeks (to keep the suspense). We did not need a book case since all books were given out each time. It was a huge success!! We have been doing this storytelling session for two years now (started Jan 2006). Our average number of children are 35 per session. We have bought around 500 books. The parents tell us that their children wake up every Saturday and practically drag them to the mosque for the storytelling session. Our children are from the neighbourhood, they walk to the session, no need for transportation, no fear for the children. The most amazing thing is that the children have developed a culture of literacy! They discuss the books they read. They recommend to each other what books to read and what author to read from. Some have never skipped a session and some come and go. We don't get back some books but that is fine because we know they are in someone's home being read. The whole objective of our project is to promote the love of reading in children. As research has proven the best time to plant that seed is before 9 years of age. If children develop the love to read , we will have given them the best tool for success, because now they can go and learn and develop what ever they want on their own (I do not have to go into details of the advantages of reading).

Having a library in the neighborhood is the key to succeeding in planting the seed because it is accessible and easy and the children can work on it by themselves because most adults in our region do not read and so may disregard the importance of reading and not go to any extra effort to help encourage their children to read. This is all solved by our "library in every neighborhood" concept. Also it does not take much of a commitment upon the storyteller. It is only 2 hours a month! The efforts are minimal compared to the results reaped.
Achievements

The biggest impact of WLR is evident in our most important stakeholders – the women and the children themselves. The women who have been involved in WLR have developed into empowered women who have gained respect of their community members not only females but more importantly males. Women from refugee camps whom we have trained have told me how the men of the neighbourhood encourage them in their role as leaders of the libraries in the neighbourhood. Mosques clerics open their doors to women to mange and administer the read aloud sessions with joy and pride. Women on a personal level have felt gratification, a sense of responsibility outside their immediate homes. They have felt that they can make a difference in their communities. They have become change agents. In the case that the reader is a young women she has started identifying in her environment things that are not right an through here empowerment has started instigating change. Older women who are readers feel a sense of fulfillment that they are serving their communities that they have something to offer. They become wise advisors in the leadership role that they assume in the neighbourhood. Mothers have become involved helping and supporting the woman reader in her role in her community. The mothers attend the read aloud sessions and read to their children at home. Mosque leaders have donated money to buy books for the libraries. Over and over, we hear stories from mothers whose children drag them out of bed to attend one of our storytelling sessions on a Saturday morning. In addition to the love of reading, the children have developed their own culture of literacy among themselves. Children discuss the books they have read before storytime and recommend new books and specific authors to their friends. This is definitely something new. Most of the children recognize and can name more authors than their parents! The majority of our children are female who are enthusiastic in engaging and in discussing the books and helping out during the read aloud session. Each storyteller is required to fill out a survey that we collect annually. The survey includes statistics on number of children of both genders that attend. Number of stories read, frequency of reading session, duration of sessions. We also do site visits to the storytellers and take pictures. The percentage of children who are female are well over 60%. All our storyteller are female. Older children who no longer attend the sessions are still readers. The sessions leave long lasting impressions influencing their decisions through out adulthood.
Libraries in Jordan

1. Trained more than 530 women how to read aloud and on the model of WLR
2. Established 130 libraries all over Jordan in both urban and rural areas mostly underprivileged map
3. Impacted directly over 4000 children across Jordan and impacted indirectly over 40,000 children across Jordan (60% female)
Libraries in the Arab world
The model has spread to many countries including: Egypt, Lebanon, UAE, Tunis, Iraq, Palestine and Saudi Arabia. The way it has spread is that when we train a lady to read aloud we tell her that she has to pay it forward (similar to the movie pay it forward) so we ask her to train someone else and we tell her to tell that person to train some else and so on. This produces a domino effect.
That is how the model has spread through individuals.
Libraries internationally
Through our website our model is implemented in Northern Thailand and in Azerbaijan. Through the domino effect the model has spread to Malaysia. The model has also spread to Mexico, Uganda and Germany.

Awards and honors
Awarded the 2009-2010 Arab world Social innovator from Synergos for the project We love reading.

One of the finalist for the Ahel Al-himmeh award. An initiative by Queen Rania of Jordan to recognize individuals from the Jordan community who do volunteer work for the community and have made a difference.

We love reading conference July 2010 for launching our initiative
Complimentary membership to the Clinton Global Initiative 2010 where we pledged a commitment to open another 100 libraries in the next 5 years.

Innovation in Education by Charles Leadbeater
We love reading has been chosen to be one of 16 cases of innovation in education along with MIT open courseware in the book Innovation in education commissioned by WISE Qatar foundation to Charles Leadbeater. The book was published in Nov 2011.

Local partners
1. We have partnered with the Hashemite University in Jordan, to reach more constituents and introduce our model in the academic curricula to inspire students to volunteer and serve their communities. Our students are all female.

2. On a local level, we have identified partners with the Amman Municipality to begin training librarians and launching weekly read aloud programs in their locally administered libraries.

3. In Jordan the WLR initiative has partnered with Injaz-Junior Achievement, a leading youth education initiative reaching a large base of students in the Arab world. Tapping into Injaz’s local resources to recruit potential trainees and youth volunteers will provide the WLR program with a staff of volunteers to expand the model to more poverty pockets across the country.

4. Reliance Co. (JORDAN) is a small local group that offers service in system integration, specialized training in safety and environment and offers consultation and ISO certification. Since 2007, Reliance has offered in kind support and taken an active role in spreading the WLR model and has pledged to continue to support WLR program as needed.

5. The WLR program has entered into a partnership in Nov 2009 with the Ruwwad community development organization sponsored by ARAMEX which has formed a network of local libraries in underdeveloped neighborhoods in Jordan to replicate our model in their community centers. This partnership allows our organization to leverage their local resources and facilities in providing reading programs to reach over 10,000 more children in Jordan. We anticipate that by 2012 our partnership with ARAMEX and Ruwwad will serve over 8 of the governorates in Jordan and inspire hundreds of thousands of children to read for pleasure.
International partners

1. We have expanded beyond the Arab world to Turkey. We have established a collaboration with the Mother Child Education Foundation (ACEV) and Hüsnü Özyeğin Foundation, two pioneering non-profit organizations in Turkey working in the areas of education, women's empowerment, and rural development. As a result of this collaboration 400 youth volunteers are reading aloud in neighbourhoods in Istanbul.

2. We have partnered with Mercy corps Jordan to implement our model in the neighbourhoods they work in (100 neighbourhoods). The objective is to introduce stories that focus on the environment and conservation of water and energy.

3. I have been approached by two different organizations to implement the model in the US. One the playwire foundation for implementing the model in New York state the other a private citizen for implementing it in Urbana Champaign, Ill USA. (work in progress).

4. We have presented our model in the UAE in attempt to introduce the model officially.

Authors and publishers

The WLR initiative has partnered with leading global publisher, Scholastic International and Dar Al Mahal, a regional children's book publisher to expand reading programs throughout the region and provide pro-bono Arabic language books for children to read. There is a paucity of good quality Arabic–language children's books in addition to difficulties in accessing available Arabic-language children’s books. Our partnerships with these leading publishers have leveraged pro-bono resources for our initiative and allowed children a wide selection of reading materials. We anticipate that by 2012 our partnership with Scholastic International and Dar Al Manhal will provide over 20,000 children access to children's books that are both appealing and appropriate. We have collaborated with local authors in Jordan who have supported us by donations.
Highlights

Achievements of our trainees include: one trainee has started a proper library in the building for union of labour. In Northern Shouna a rural area, our storyteller has told us that the reading sessions are literally saving lives of children who would otherwise be playing in dangerous places. One of our trainees has started this summer a read aloud movement in Jeddah called reading is my pleasure. She and a group of ladies go to the community centers and read aloud to girls. They have also developed a curricula for read aloud for a Dar Al Hikma college for women in Jeddah.

A female graduate student from the Clinton school for public service interned at WLR in 2011.

We Love Reading has been invited to speak at the Qatar Foundation third annual World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) in Doha, Qatar, from 1 to 3 November 2011. WLR has also been invited to be a keynote speaker at the Mexico Clase Education conference November 2012 and at the World Islamic Economic Forum in Malaysia December 2012.
In the media

In the media the idea of read aloud is spreading through the media to parents and adults who have started to read to children. WLR has been interviewed on local TV, radio, newspapers, regional TV, Al Jazeera, International media, VOA, US airway in flight magazine and the Huffington post. I have also given a talk in TEDxDeadsea April 2011. We love reading has also been featured in a documentary by the Fulbright program and Euro news.
Projects and activities

1. A Library in every neighbourhood (2013)
   **Funded by the Middle Eastern Partnership Initiative**
   This is a partnership project between Taghyeer and INJAZ that will improve the quality of basic education in Jordan through community empowerment of children and youth. Groups of youth volunteers will promote the development of reading skills in children of both genders, aged 4-10. INJAZ will select the volunteers and provide civic education centers in 4 rural areas in Jordan, and Taghyeer will train the volunteers to become storytellers. Through the training and participation in the project, the youth volunteers in the selected areas will strengthen their civic engagement and develop soft skills.

   **Funded by Public Action Program USAID (150,000 USD) 2013**
   The objective is to develop 12 books and materials addressing ethical and cultural behavior of children ages 4-10 related to issues of water, energy and environment. The books will then be distributed among the children of the we love reading libraries across Jordan.

   **Funded by the US embassy Amman**
   This project comes as a new and innovative outreach tool that brings together an American illustrator who can work together with a group of young writers and artists to create American classics in Arabic with illustrations and very simple and fun narration. The collection of these classics can be published and distributed to children in Jordan and the region.

4. WLR training
   We have three trainings per year. We train individuals how to establish a library in their neighbourhood and how to read aloud.

**Personnel**

Program Director
Program Manager
Program Assistant 1
Program Assistant 2
Trainer
Accountant
Readers
The future: Call to action

WLR is based on the members of the community. WLR seeks to foster the spirit of belonging in the community to build ownership to instigate positive change. We aim to achieve that by encouraging volunteerism especially in the young. There are multiple ways one can volunteer with WLR; becoming a reader, advocating for reading, volunteering to organize and outreach or simply just reading to your own children.

WLR envisions more and more children reading. In order to satisfy their thirst for books WLR seeks new resources for books and to encourage writers to increase the range and variety of choices of books for the children.

WLR is constantly looking for individuals and organizations who are passionate to make a real difference in this world. WLR offers this opportunity through an innovation that reaps benefits in a short time.
**Donor list:**
Synergos
Ministry of Culture Jordan
Reliance
ARAMEX
US Embassy Jordan
Publishers: Scholastic Dar ALManhal
Authors: Abeer Taher, Taghreed Najjar
USAID ECODIT
MEPI

**Partner list**
Reliance
INJAZ
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