



Read with Me

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“Read with me” is a project designed and implemented by the Institute for Research on the History of Children’s Literature in Iran (IRHCL), to promote reading for/with disadvantaged children who are generally at risk. The objective of this project is to make quality books accessible to this group of children and young adults who may not be able to access quality books in the routine of their lives. After about ten years of the project’s implementation, Read with Me has made permanent effects on the lives of children in many different aspects.

By fall 2019, Read with Me has covered more than 100,000 children and young adults, and 5000 teachers, tutors and volunteers, most of them girls and women in deprived areas, who have little chance for a change in their lives. Through reading of quality books and seeing the world in a different way, now many of them have other perspectives in their lives.



Basic Literacy improvement

Many children in deprived areas of Iran, especially bilingual children, suffer from lack of proper education and therefore fluency in reading and writing. Not gaining the basic literacy, they face many problems in continuing their studies in following years and many of them leave the school. By implementing the child-centered methods of "creative education through children's literature", during these ten years, Read with Me has been able to give thousands of children an opportunity to learn better, and spend joyful moments at school.



Out of school children

Many children from immigrant families, mostly from Afghanistan and Pakistan, and even some Iranian children lack identification documents and thus, they do not have a chance to go to school. There are also working children who spend their days working and hence unable to attend the school. Read with Me has worked in some centers in different parts of Iran, focusing on these children, helping them to read and write and become literate and changing their lives by taking them outside of the streets and giving them the chance to change their lives.



Literacy education for adults

Read with Me always insists on the importance of reading with children at home and by their parents. But there are illiterate parents who cannot read a book with their children even if they are really eager to. In some centers, the literacy improvement program is implemented for mothers to help them become literate and be able to read with their children. These women learn many skills in addition to reading and writing, helping them to express themselves and be better parents for their children.



Job opportunities

Read with Me have established more than 60 libraries in different parts of Iran. These libraries are mostly run by local women, giving them a job and a new insight to their lives.



Impact on Teachers

By October 2019, more than 5,000 teachers, tutors and volunteers have been trained in the Read with Me workshops, most of them young women. Many of them declare the project has changed their lives, finding the hope, power and living values in children books in their own lives.

The Read with Me staff

There are more than 50 women involved in the running of the project, some of them working in the office and some of them travelling to remote areas of the country, holding workshops, monitoring the project implementation and making it all happen.





Asma

Asma is a 14-year-old girl in a small village in Zahedan, Sistan and Balouchestan. There is only an elementary school in their village and after finishing the elementary school, the students should continue their studies in another village. But girls are not allowed to go to a school far from home. So Asma, and many other girls do not have an opportunity to study after the sixth grade. And they are expected to get married at very young ages.

When Read with Me established a small rural library in their village, Asma became the young adult librarian of this library. She spends her time in the library, reading books to younger children, doing book-related activities, and also studying. She does not go to school now, but her former teacher has registered her in a high school in Zahedan, she studies at home and gets the exams at the end of the year and proceeds every year. She stays connected to the world of books and knowledge through this small Read with Me library.

There are numerous girls like Asma in Sistan and Balouchestan, deprived from school but with lots of hope for a better future for their children, and Read with Me opens a tiny door toward that future for them.



Fariba

Fariba is a woman in her thirties. She lives in Rijab, a beautiful village near Sarpol-Zahab, Kermanshah. She studied law in university, got married after graduating from the university and settled down in this village. Living in a small village, she didn't have a chance to work outside home and be out in the society. "After some years, I felt stuck at home and this place seemed to me like the end of the world", she mentions. When the earthquake struck Kermanshah, and caused huge destructions in vast areas in the west of Iran in 2017, Read with Me started to work in the region focusing on bibliotherapy for children in trauma. After that catastrophe, Read with Me established many cabin libraries in different parts of this region, one of them in Rijab. When the library started its activities, Fariba worked there as a librarian. She went to workshops held by the Read with Me trainers about the children's literature, quality books, book-related activities, and librarianship. Now, she spends her days working with children, helping them to see the beauty of the world through books and stories and giving them hope for better days.



Khadijeh

Khadijeh is 28 years old and a mother to three children, an eight, a three and a one year-old. She and her family live in MahmoudAbad, a village in marginal and underserved areas of Tehran. Like every other mother, she always has had the biggest dreams for her children, wishing them to be successful and decent people in the future. When she was pregnant with her third child she was introduced to The Supportive Education Center of MahmoudAbad, where the Read with Me “Reading with Babies and Toddlers” workshops were held. There, she learnt about the importance of reading with children even before birth. She started working with her unborn child based on her learnings in the workshops, talking to her, reading lullabies, until she was born. Then she started reading special books for her newborn, mostly picture books with no text. And she noticed how different this child of hers was than the others, more brilliant, more attentive and with better reactions. Knowing how strongly she can change her children’s lives, she wanted to read more books with them, but she was illiterate. And the situation became her motivation to learn to read and write, to read and learn about motherhood and treating with her children. “Now I have even better relationship with my husband”, she says. Now she has reached the tool she needed to lead her children toward a better life.



Roghayye

Roghayye is one of the Read with Me selected teachers in South Khorasan who has devoted her time to reading promotion after getting to know the Read with Me project. She was married to an abusive husband for many years. Living in a small city and accepting the situation as her fate, she never believed she could change her life. Five years ago, she attended the Read with Me workshops and received her book packages. The books in the Read with Me project are chosen by a group of experts and they are all quality books dealing with important issues such as environment and living values. After months of reading the books with children and helping them to realize the meaning in every layer of the text, she found herself braver, more powerful and more motivated to change her own life. Now, she lives as a single mother with her two children, believing in herself and believing how quality books can affect the lives of children.



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