

**Building Peace by Piece:
Fostering a Reading Culture Amongst Refugees in Zaatari Village
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Project Statement

We propose creating a library with educational programming in the Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan to foster a reading culture among K-12 students in an attempt to supplement existing education efforts.

Background

The Zaatari Refugee Camp was created in Jordan in 2012 to provide shelter for Syrians forced to flee their country as a result of the Syrian Civil War that began in 2011. The camp currently houses approximately 84,000 refugees, half of whom are under the age of 18. Often referred to as the “Lost Generation,” many Syrian refugee children lack access to proper education. Educational facilities and resources in the camp are scarce and do not meet the needs of the community. Dar Al Yasmin (DAY) is an organization dedicated to supporting Syrian refugees in Zaatari through the implementation of community-based education projects. In working with DAY to establish a library within a vacant space provided by the organization, we aim to empower youth and foster a reading culture in Zaatari Village.

Purpose

One of the inalienable rights put forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is that of education. Education is one of the strongest tools an individual can utilize for empowerment as well as a nonviolent approach to tackling issues and conflicts in the modern world. This strong and universal connection between education and peace serves as the foundation of our plan to build a library in Zaatari.

Our goal is to foster reading by creating an environment in which community members can actively seek out educational materials. Through our partnerships with DAY and local volunteers, we will ensure that our efforts are conducted within the cultural norms and considerations of the community. This project differs from other organizations’ initiatives since the goal is to create community ownership of the resources and the space.

Project Approach

Initially, the library will be equipped with approximately 1,100 books, primarily for grades K-12. Most of the books will be purchased in Jordan and are written in Arabic to ensure that ideas addressed in the books are pertinent to the region’s cultural context. The library will also contain a selection of English and bilingual books that will primarily serve to build the English skills of refugees, which is important since English proficiency often correlates with opportunity for further education and employment.

The library will be furnished with study tables with the goal of providing a space where students can come to study and do homework after school. In addition, the library will provide basic school supplies that students may need to be able to complete their school assignments. The key to the library’s success is the community’s involvement and

ownership of the center. Local volunteers will help children with their homework in subjects such as Arabic, English, and math through weekly tutoring sessions. Tutors helping students with Arabic will focus on practicing reading and writing Modern Standard Arabic, which will give students formal writing skills and allow them to engage more effectively with news media, political life, and business life. We will collaborate with the nonprofit We Love Reading to train local refugees in Arabic and English storytelling. These storytellers will lead weekly storytelling circles attended by other members of the community with the goal of introducing reading to local youth in a way that is fun and encouraging.

In order to publicize the creation of the library, we will hold an inaugural *Eid* dinner in which we will introduce the library and its programming to the community. The dinner will serve not only as a service to individuals that cannot afford a holiday celebration, but also as an opportunity to foster community engagement among locals. Further efforts to foster community engagement will include an extension of existing work by DAY to engage Jordanians and Syrians in community events to overcome existing tensions between the two populations. For example, the storytelling and reading groups will promote peace by bringing together both Syrian and local Jordanian youth.

Time Frame

The project will take approximately two months to complete. For the first two to three weeks, we will gather materials in Amman, such as books and furniture, and work to prepare the space in Zaatari with the help of DAY and their volunteers. Since the library opening will coincide with the end of Ramadan, the *Eid* dinner will be held for community members at this time.

During this time and into week four, we will work with We Love Reading to schedule sessions for locals and volunteers to be trained in storytelling, and to consider cultural norms applicable to the library's programming. We expect the training sessions to last approximately a week and will hold our first storytelling session on week five and the second on week seven. During the last four weeks, our role will be to evaluate the progress of the storytelling sessions, implement the tutoring program, and improve strategies as we see fit.

Sustainability and Feasibility

Because DAY holds office space in Zaatari and our library complements their objectives as an organization, DAY will carry on the services of the library through the support of their 150-200 volunteers who vary in ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, with the goal of establishing the center to be a community-run initiative. DAY will also ensure that the space is locked and secured when it is not in use. With their commitment, as well as that of We Love Reading, we will continue ongoing education programs in the community of Zaatari Village to ensure the project's commitment to fostering peace through education.

Our role in the establishment of the project will be to administer and ensure its long-term sustainability. We will gather materials, connect local volunteers from DAY and We Love Reading with community members, and train volunteers using instructional manuals that we will compile.