

## The Literacy Program: A Road to Self Discovery

### Texting My Way to Literacy

Sometimes it's not just enough to get a potential learner to attend a literacy class.

They can simply show up one day and decide against it the next. If a curriculum is too difficult or the teaching methods are mundane, that's enough to discourage even the most self-motivated of these women.

That's why the team of facilitators and master trainers at the Lafarge Literacy Program are always keen to develop and improve the teaching curricula as well as innovate on the teaching techniques to help learners know how to read and write sentences used in everyday language.

Enter an individual's single most prized possession, their mobile phone. Regardless of age, sex or demographic, everyone seems to be constantly glaring at their phone screens.

With this in mind, our team came up with the clever idea of integrating its use

into the learning program.

Learners are trained on how to write text messages on mobile phones as a new teaching method that helps them recognize the way certain unusual letters are written. The facilitator sends a text message to the learner asking her to respond as a way of practicing writing the message.

This has also helped them in learning some life skills and a way to use modern technology.

Over time, learners have improved in writing messages and have even started using them to send greetings to their family members and friends on different occasions.

In addition to learning a new way to communicate with people around them, learners have found this new teaching technique quite fascinating.

"Reading has literally shown me the way," says D. A, a 39 year old mother of four, "I didn't

know how to read or write and when I heard that literacy classes started close to my home, I decided to go because I constantly faced plenty of problems from being unable to read.

For example, six months ago, I took the underground metro wanting to go to 'El Shohada' station. However, I got off at a different station because I couldn't read the signs and got lost. Now, I can go anywhere and don't get lost. I can also now sign my name!"



Women's at literacy class

# The Sweet Scent of Success

Bring together a group of women to talk about a subject they love and you will have successfully managed to attain their undivided attention.

As part of Lafarge's Literacy program, participants are taught more than just how to read and write.

They are taught valuable lessons about life and how to develop both educationally and financially.

The first initiative in this direction was teaching the program participants how to make their own liquid soap which can be used for personal hygiene or cleaning purposes.

In 12 sessions, women learned that with basic inexpensive ingredients they could both rationalize consumption and jump-start a new business.

At the beginning of class, the trainer reviews the required material and the tools for liquid soap making process which includes a sulfuric package, Batas packets, a plastic container filled with six liters of water for each package as well as a special color and scent to be added at the final stage.

The trainer adds together all the ingredients in a big container and while mixing them up, talks with the attendees about the importance of rationalizing the consumption rate and how they can enhance their in-



come through home soap making as a simple craft that, ultimately, can be transformed into income generating projects.

It's an interactive process that allows the women to assist the trainer.

They not only physically incorporate the ingredients together but are also involved in the scent, texture and color selection.

Then they are taught how to package their newly formulated products and after a session of questions and answers, the women are rewarded with individual packs of the soap they helped in making. It's one of the most exciting classes for the women who are not only fond of boasting new home economics

skills to their friends but anticipate creating extra income from their new found knowledge.

"My soap is definitely in demand!" says Om Ayman, a mother of three, "I used to help my husband by selling grocery items at the entrance of our small home.

After learning how to make liquid soap, I started by producing just a small quantity to see if it would sell with our other products. Given the increased demand on my soap, I have now increased my capacity and dream of transforming this craft into a project of my own to improve my family's standard of living."

# Learning the Facts of Life through 'The Arab Woman Program'

Many a times in developing countries, where chasing food and shelter is the number one priority, awareness of basic human rights somehow takes a backseat to survival.

However it is this right to a better living that ultimately makes us human and when so many women fail to recognize that they can be more than just wives and mothers that is where they miss out on the true potential of their lives.

When Lafarge created the literacy program, it realized the need for educational seminars that would also help the women of Ezbat and Arab El Walda put their feet on the first steps of acknowledging their real roles in society.

The program objectives include providing them with the means for continuous self-discovery as well as raising awareness about their rights and duties so that they may defend them and fight off any attempts to violate them.

The program discusses many topics, some of which, despite their importance are regarded as taboo. It tackles boosting self-confidence, dealing with any kind of assaults, forms of violence or discrimination and the perils of early marriage.



It's a tall order for women who are just discovering that they actually have any rights but some topics are also of immeasurable value.

Psychiatrists are brought in to teach them how to properly raise their children so that they can reach their highest potential.

They are also offered legal education about personal status issues, official documents and how to obtain them, the rules of inheritance, checks, receipts and any legality that burdens these women on a daily basis. In short, it's a crash course in the facts of life.



# A Trip to Fostat Garden Because Girls Just Want to Have Fun

Cindy Lauper wasn't kidding when she sang her famous "Girls just want to have fun" song in the 80s. They have a lot of responsibilities and a little fun is sometimes all it takes to keep them motivated.

So a field trip was organized to the Fostat Garden, which presented itself as an ideal location for both the female participants and their children to enjoy. And as Mothers basked in the beauty of the scenery, they were quite content watching their children enjoy themselves close by

Then following the lunch break, the women created their own talent show showcasing their unique talents, which included singing and playing on wooden instruments. Some of them merely rediscovered their inner child and made for the swings or played games together.

By the end of the day, the original plan had witnessed success because spirits were high. "When can we do this again?" they asked eagerly. Our response was quite predictable, "Very soon!"



Girls have fun

# Lafarge Employees Lend Their Own Knowledge

Because this program is a companywide initiative which, directly impacts Lafarge's ambitions of contributing 1 million volunteer hours per year, employees continue to put in extra time to transform this dream into a reality. From the initial days of participating in cleanup and beautification campaigns to their latest endeavor of lending their knowledge, Lafarge's employees have their work cut out for them.



In September, we decided to replicate our "Business in a Box" training program, conducted previously for the children of our employees, in Ezbet El Walda community. We invited 45 university students of the Ezba to participate in a two-day training session provided by LaFarge employees at EW youth club.



The objective was to provide students with a thorough understanding of the basics of corporate business management. The courses, including an introduction to Finance, Safety and Branding, which were run by a number of Lafarge top executives, who gave students insight into their experiences working for Lafarge. This idea which was initially implemented for the benefit of our employee's kids has successfully lent itself to expansion for all youths that can benefit from it.

We were happy to see how Business in a Box found such an eager audience in the EW and AW youths who not only actively participated during the training period but also sought out their trainers to answer every last question they could think of.



# Lafarge Presents Four Schools with PC Labs

No education is complete without technology being a substantial part of it.

Accordingly, Lafarge has selected 4 elementary schools in the EW and AW areas to award new computer labs.

Due to large student density within these schools and an average of only 1 or 2 PCs per lab, most learning is theoretical without much practical implementation.

This situation does not aid much in teaching students technical skills and so a total of 30 new computers were assigned across the four schools and made available throughout the year even during the summer months.

Students and teachers are extremely happy with the new labs and believe that their hopes for better computer learning has definitely taken a turn for the better!

