



## HOW A DAYCARE IS MAKING EDUCATION POSSIBLE FOR MOTHERS IN JORDAN

*THE STORY OF SONDAS BASHIRI*

**E**ach day, Sondas Bashiri, 24 years old, attends the Vocational Training Corporation (VTC) in her hometown of Irbid, Jordan. Here, she is enrolled in a Medical Office Assistant (MOA) program, learning skills that will equip her to work in administration for the medical field.

Before she enters the center, Sondas drops her 16-month old son, Kareem, in the care of qualified caregivers, trained in Early Childcare Development (ECD). This facility is one of the Women's Economic Linkages and Employment Development (WE LEAD) project's piloted strategies to address one of several gender-specific barriers that Jordanian women face when entering the workforce - a lack of quality childcare facilities. This project is funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and implemented through a consortium between the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) and the Canadian Leaders in International Consulting (CLIC).

Prior to this, Sondas worked as a school teacher. This was not because she desired the job, but because her family encouraged her to since it was deemed an acceptable career for a woman. After getting married and having a child, she decided to pursue a career path that she had more interest in. Wanting to improve the customer service she saw in hospitals after experiencing impoliteness from the receptionists, the MOA program appealed to her.

However, attending school while tending to a young child is extremely difficult, and Sondas was unsure at first if she would be able to enroll in the MOA program; her only options for childcare were overcrowded and expensive private daycares, or leaving Kareem with her grandmother, who is very old.

## FINDING APPROPRIATE CHILDCARE: A BARRIER FOR WOMEN ENTERING THE WORKFORCE

"I thought that I could not take this program,



*Sondas brings Kareem to the VTC Daycare / VTC, Irbid*

because I needed to find a good place for my son," Sondas explained.

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*Sondas checks on Kareem while he is playing games that will help him to develop his capacity and ability. / VTC, Irbid*

Culturally, it is the responsibility of women in Jordan to look after their children: 37 percent of women choose not to work because they would rather care for their children. Without access to adequate child care facilities, it makes it very difficult for them to even consider pursuing work.

Additionally, there is a low level of trust amongst parents with existing daycares. With a lack of theoretical and practical competencies from caregivers, the recurrence of caregiver's violence and health negligence, parents are often reluctant to leave their children in such care.

Furthermore, even if one manages to find a suitable daycare for their child, it is difficult to find secure transportation to and from work or school, without adding a trip to daycare in the mix. In line with this, WE LEAD targets lack of transportation options, another gender specific

barrier that women face when entering the workforce.

## WE LEAD'S SOLUTION: PILOTING CHILDCARE FACILITIES

Fortunately for Sondas, she learned that a daycare had recently opened at the VTC. She was excited to see it, and was highly impressed with the facility: it was clean, secure, comfortable, and it had attentive caregivers. It was the perfect solution - Kareem could come with her to the VTC and stay in the daycare while she took her classes.

Fulfilling the ambitions of women like Sondas is exactly the intention of the WE LEAD project's two piloted daycare's - including the one at the Irbid VTC center and another at Istishari Hospital

(a private hospital). This initiative is being implemented in partnership with the VTCs and the National Council for Family Affairs (NCFA).

For women with children, having a daycare that is safe, affordable, and accessible is key.

In Sondas' experience, having access to a daycare at the VTC has been of immense value. While she is in class, Kareem plays happily in the daycare.

"I check on him all the time, and he is playing and discovering new things...he plays games that build his ability and capacity" she says.

In Jordan, the benefits of enrolling one's child in a quality daycare with trained caregivers still remain largely unknown to the population. Quality daycares enable children to develop new skills and engage with their peers, enhancing their personal development. The caregivers are trained in ECD, meaning that they are qualified and knowledgeable to take care of young children and help them build their capacity.

With the successful implementation of these facilities, the VTCs and private sector institutions will see the benefits of providing child care for their female workers. Not only will it increase retention of their female employees, but it will also increase staff satisfaction and thus improve customers overall experience.

## THE ROAD AHEAD: CHANGING SOCIAL NORMS

Ultimately, social norms are the root cause of the barriers to women's economic empowerment in Jordan. Social norms dictate that women should stay at home, that they should be the primary caregivers in the household, and that it is their responsibility to care for their children.

This is why WE LEAD strives to not only bring about the practical solution of daycares, but also to raise awareness about the issue on a broader level. Without understanding of women's economic empowerment at a

household, community, and national level, it would be difficult to achieve long-lasting change.

With these piloted daycares, the WE LEAD Project aspires to encourage other organizations to replicate this model in order to increase economic empowerment for women. The project targets women who would not have been able to enroll in educational programs or work, without childcare facilities. Across Jordan, there are many women such as Sondas who have had to put their educational or career pursuits on hold in order to care for their children. With safe, accessible, and affordable daycare services at their places of employment or school, more mothers in Jordan will have the opportunity to seek further education or employment.

The Women's Economic Linkages and Employment Development (WE LEAD) Project (2017-2021), funded by Global Affairs Canada, is run in consortium with World University Service of Canada (WUSC) and the Canadian International Consulting Company (CLIC). This project is in partnership with the Government of Jordan, Jordanian organizations, and private sector institutions, seeks to increase the number of Jordanian women and female youth in the workforce through two training programs: Medical Office Assistance (MOA) and Healthcare Support Worker (HSW). Additionally, the project addresses both the gender-specific barriers and social norms that prevent women from entering the workforce.

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