

A photograph of two young women sitting in front of a window with horizontal blinds. The woman on the left is wearing a bright pink hijab and a black top with white polka dots. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The woman on the right is wearing a black and white patterned hijab and a black top. She is also looking towards the camera. The background shows the window blinds and some indoor plants.

cover story

A New Leaf For Oman

Juhaina Al Farsi, Reem Al Badani and a team of eight other young Omanis are pioneering a new social breakthrough with their 'Embrace Your Book' campaign, aimed at enhancing the culture of reading in the Sultanate



A quiet change is taking place in Oman. The only noise being made over it is the turning of pages, of a new leaf. 'Embrace Your Book' is a social awareness campaign and breakthrough, aimed at encouraging the culture of reading in the Sultanate.

Conceptualised and spearheaded by ten young, bright Omanis – the Oman Advocacy & Awareness Team – aims to promote and strengthen the culture of reading in the Sultanate. FACES met up with Juhaina Al Farsi and Reem Al Badani, two among these ten pioneers, in a bid to better understand Oman's first ever, formal reading awareness campaign. Its objective is formally stated as "developing a learning society by promoting the habit of reading among youth as a means of self expression, developing their personal potential and taking pride in their identity."

As part of the Global Change Makers group chosen by British Council Oman, Juhaina, Reem and the rest of the ten core members attended workshops in Jordan and later Lebanon with other

Arab region teams. As part of the programme, the team had to identify and pick one national issue, which they had to broaden out, work on and present at the workshop. "The ten of us had to come up with something that impacted and affected every single one of us, and we hit upon reading, because it's important to everyone, and helped us get to where we are now," say Juhaina and Reem. "We had 24 hours to flesh it out, submit a video, presentations and PPTs. As part of social media training, they were instructed in getting across the message effectively across regular media and also YouTube, Facebook, Twitter etc.

"Basically, 'Embrace Your Book' will focus on the importance of reading and its effects on the individual. Our workshops will not only promote just reading, but how to benefit from it," says Juhaina. Apart from school and university events, their main goal for 2010 is a Reading Festival, "and we will try to bond and showcase other talents with reading, such as music concerts, writing competitions, public speaking and more, making it interactive for



embrace
your book

READING IN OMAN

→ The campaign is initiated and managed by 10 young Omanis from different backgrounds.

→ The main objective is to promote the culture of reading in Omani youth.

→ Currently, the core team is looking for an organisation to adopt them and act as their umbrella body, under which they can function formally and approach sponsors for events.

→ Visit their official website <http://www.safi7.com>, email: embrace.your.book@gmail.com and visit their Twitter account <http://twitter.com/readOman>. Call 96681441, 97020032, 92981080

Membership in the campaign is open to all Omani youth who are passionate about books, reading and could add value to the initiatives of the group



Reem (left) and Juhaina (above) are part of a core group of ten youngsters who came up with the idea on their own

participants." Another goal is to form a social book club, for readers to choose books to be read, discuss them collectively, and make socialising a fun part and an offshoot of the reading process. Getting down famous authors and writers, from the GCC region and beyond, is another idea in the pipeline, and an added incentive.

The team – comprising Juhaina, Reem, Alyaa Al Hashmi, Hanan Al Rahbi, Salim Al Riyami, Taghreed Al Wahibi, Alyaa Al Hinai, Faisal Al Saidi, Zaid Al Mayahi and Abeer Al Bulushi – had their objectives in place; proposals, programmes and all aspects of the campaign well thought out and put on paper, before the launch this March.

Currently, the core team is looking for an organisation to 'adopt' them and act as their umbrella body, under which they can function formally and approach sponsors for their events.

This is no flash in the pan for sure. "We're taking the new road with this, and a hitherto untried way of doing things, and so we want the campaign to take off fast, which depends on the sponsorships and response we're hoping for," explains Reem.

For the core team of 'Embrace Your Book', it has been a life changing experience. "The whole campaign has changed us, and we would now like to transfer the benefits to others," say the girls. The fact that eight out of

the ten are still students mean hectic workloads, late evening meetings (even online after midnight!) and limited finances (they have largely pooled in on their own, with initial funding from British Council Oman). The team is also looking to expand their numbers to 20 members, and are looking for dedicated young Omanis interested in the cause.

Reading is the formula for success, the youngsters behind 'Embrace Your Book' believe. "Reading is a basic skill you need to excel in everything else. If you look at world leaders and most successful people, they are avid readers. It proves, and that's what we want to show Oman's youth – that reading can be cool too!"