

Moms with a cause

Two dynamic Jordanian mothers released their production company's first interactive educational video for toddlers in Arabic on Saturday!

By Jumana Bissiso

AMMAN — The beginning of a week for a busy Amman mother is typically chock-full of errands to run, schedules to organise and children to tend to.

But for some mothers and their toddlers, Saturday morning posed a perfect opportunity to take time out and experience a new educational trend for children: Interactive video learning... in Arabic!

The 20-minute video, "Al Haywanat Min Hawlina" (Animals Around Us), at Century Cinema, premiered to a bustling crowd of eager viewers, waiting to catch a first glimpse of the educational tool, which aims to aid in the development and education of toddlers between the ages of one and four through the use of the Arabic language.

The force behind this concept stems from two Jordanian mothers, Lamia Tabbaa-Bibi and Rama Kayyali-Jardaneh, who quickly discovered an untapped niche in the world of Arabic-based methods for learning that are comparable to popular Western productions.

The two, each holding a masters degree in video and film production, decided to team up to create an educational multimedia children's production company last summer called Al Mu-

fakiroun Al Sighar, or Little Thinking Minds, as a means to reflect Arab heritage through film, explained Tabbaa-Bibi.

"The idea really came up while my family and I were on vacation and I began showing "Baby Einstein" to my six-month-old, Hameed, and I realised there is nothing [of the same caliber] on the market that tailors to children in Arabic," said Tabbaa-Bibi, who also holds a bachelor's degree in social psychology and currently resides in London.

"You would walk into an HMV or Virgin store and be overwhelmed by the plethora of choice in educational English programming for children. Then you would walk into an Arabic video store and nothing would be available," she told The Jordan Times.

"There needs to be a certain standard of programming released [in Arabic] that does not compromise on quality," she said. "With media becoming such a common form of learning, we should take advantage of it wisely by screening quality content that stimulates and enhances our young children's minds, while bringing them closer to their roots through language, music and more."

So last June filming began on the first release shown yesterday. The video



introduced toddlers to 13 different animals typically seen in the Middle East, from cats and horses to camels and oryxes.

The programme captured the young audience by incorporating a variety of tools, including puppets, animation, real life footage and calling on children's participation as part of the fun and experience.

"The film is shot from a child's perspective in every way," Kayyali said in a statement. "Close-up shots of the animals are abundant, and shots are long in duration so as to not disturb their eyes and concentration."

Referring to early learning development specialists to ensure accurate and conducive imagery and information, the team also made certain not to exceed the 20-minute timeframe recom-



Photo courtesy Asqa TV

Lamia Tabbaa-Bibi (left) and Rama Kayyali-Jardaneh, the mothers' behind the educational multimedia children's production company 'Al Mufakiroun Al Sighar' or Little Thinking Minds, hold up the cover of their debut video, 'Al Haywanat Min Hawlina' — Animals Around Us — (shown left) at Century Cinema

mended for toddlers as a maximum amount of time spent in front of a television per day.

The film is divided into three, seven-minute parts — garden animals, desert animals and farm animals — and is edited in a way that allows for the viewing to be carried out in sections if desired.

"There is a lack of such ideas targeting this particular age group, so this project is a wonderful opportunity to educate a region where the percentage of children is one of the highest in the world," Director of the Performing Arts Centre Lina Attal, who lent creative feedback on the project, told

The Jordan Times.

"A culture of kindness to animals leads to a culture of kindness in life, and I was very pleased with the film, it was wonderful. We need other socially progressive videos that explain to children [the importance of such things as] water conservation et cetera," explained Donna Naber, one of the owners of the Hill House Kindergarten in Abdoun.

Mothers attending the screening also shared their enthusiasm for the programme.

"I liked it a lot. Finally there is something produced in Arabic for children," said Hana Bushnaq, a

young mother of Hind (2) and Zeinab (3). Her sister Salma Bushnaq, a mother of 17-month-old Hamza, on holiday in the Kingdom from San Fransisco, agreed but was a bit more critical.

"It is a copy of Baby Einstein, and it needs a lot of editing... but the kids loved it and in the end that's what really counts," she said.

The film is available at Prime Megastore and MusicBox and will soon be at bookstores and supermarkets across town in both DVD and VHS format.

The production company is set to release three more programmes by June 2005, including films on shapes and numbers.