

The Reading Connection

With each flip and swish of a page as it is turned, the young reader is immediately transported elsewhere. They may be soaring through clouds with wizards, clinking teacups as their pinkies are held high alongside princesses, or fighting fierce goblins in the forest, all while in their own home. What is it that drives the young reader to ask their caregivers for just one more story, to stay up and hide a flashlight under the covers just to see their book? What force is so strong, so compelling that there are kids who, just like me when I was little, would get in trouble for reading "too much"? The answer is told in the well-known saying, "a reader lives a thousand lives before he dies." Books contain stories that carry one into a range of situations they've never handled before, giving a child a chance to encounter everything brand new while spending precious time in the safety and care of someone who loves them.

My Social Impact Initiative is titled "The Reading Connection." The objective of my initiative is to showcase the many positive effects reading has to offer and to instill a love of it throughout my community. While children are reading fictional stories, they are paving the pathway to creating all types of connections. The connections I will focus on and help improve upon will be the emotional connection empathy provides and the physical connection of reading with another person. Reading at an early age ignites a spark in a child's mind, recognizing that people are surrounding them and realizing that not one person is the same. This is where empathy comes into play, because although we may feel one way about someone else's life and their choices, that person has their own opinion, and the key to understanding one another is empathy. As I have researched the correlation between reading and empathy, a finding that was seen multiple times was that "reading fictional stories has been found to be associated with development of empathy in children, suggesting that there is an important link between the empathy felt for fictional characters and the ability to empathize with people in reality." To further convince why reading is such a small task with a significant consequence, it has been found, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, that "reading significantly encourages a strong, emotional bond between parents and their children." We are humans, and as humans, our basic needs are to be wanted and loved. There is no better way to fulfill this need and accomplish even more than to spend priceless time in a book with a person in your life.

My plan to help the Roy City Community create more capacity for empathy in their lives and connect people of all ages is through reading. I have set out a day where weekly I can visit schools in our city to discuss what empathy means, how students can apply it to their own lives, and spend time reading with them. I will also be hosting "Reading with Miss Roy" nights at libraries, where anyone is welcome to listen to a story and learn how it can change their lives. The books I will read to these students and others will include real-world diversity and situations they themselves or others may face, as well as the whimsical and magical, while still teaching a valuable lesson. I will also be organizing book drives to help those in need, because without access to books, there is no access to the rewards of reading. By intentionally setting up a space and time where children can read, I am directly impacting their future. The Reading Connection is a plan put in place to expand a child's ability to excel in feeling for others and expressing the miracle that is empathy while feeling truly loved. Our world is in dire need of those who can walk a mile in someone else's shoes and implement changes that will both be effective and driven by proper understanding. By joining our children and starting now in their reading journey, we can meet this goal and even surpass it.

Love For Our Elders

Over the past two years we have all globally felt the impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic. We have spent weeks or even months in self isolation, and have gone a long time without seeing the faces of strangers, and even those we love most. While we all have sacrificed significantly during the pandemic, the world's older population has been particularly marginalized. Unfortunately, many senior citizens live by themselves, or in care facilities. When the COVID-19 pandemic surfaced, these older adults were forced to be isolated from their families and support systems. I have seen firsthand the emotional, physical and mental toll many senior citizens have experienced during the pandemic, and also in their daily lives.

Older adults are faced with many challenges. Most older adults are diagnosed with chronic illnesses which may include arthritis, diabetes, and heart disease. According to the CDC, eighty percent have at least one chronic condition. The National Institute of Mental Health has linked chronic illness to depression and other mental health challenges. Senior citizens before COVID-19 were at predisposition to poor mental health. With a year of isolation, the effects are staggering. It is imperative that we, as a community, give back to those who have given so much to our future. As Miss Utah I am prepared to lead that charge, and give back to senior citizens in my community and country.

“Love For Our Elders” is a non-profit organization created by a 13-year-old boy who found a passion for building relationships with senior citizens.. The organization's purpose is to connect young people with those aging in their community for the benefit of both groups. I am certain the method of service embodied in my social impact initiative will be immensely advantageous for both the elderly and young people of Utah. Leading by example, I will help to develop bonds that are emotionally and physically healing, receive comfort, and find a greater meaning to life.

I chose “Love for Our Elders” because it is something that hits close to home, I have the opportunity to live my Social Impact Initiative every day as I care for the aging generation in an assisted living center as a CNA. As Miss Roy I have been able to visit local schools and hold letter writing sessions where the students have been able to write letters to older adults in the community. Being able to deliver these letters will forever be some of my most cherished moments. I have been able to help students set up their own service opportunities in local care facilities. I have firsthand seen the impact these relationships have and I am confident there is a benefit that transcends generation gaps. I look forward to continuing helping others build these relationships as Miss Utah.

The Miss America organization embodies service and allows women like me to make an extraordinary impact on the community, state, and country. I know as Miss Utah, my social impact initiative “Love For Our Elders,” will result in meaningful relationships and happier lives for many.

Signature/Date