
LIVING NATION

The Bahá'í Council for England Newsletter

Beloved Coworkers in the field of service,

The Bahá'í Council for England is delighted to share with you the second issue of the newly relaunched 'Living Nation.'

It has been an eventful summer, including intense teaching campaigns throughout the country, regional youth conferences, summer schools and, most recently, a newly instituted national tutor seminar.

As we strive to align our lives with the rhythm and pulse of the community building work underway in our clusters, it is timely that we have been blessed with new additions to the materials of the Institute with the publication of Book 5 (Junior Youth), as well as the release of a pre-publication version of Book 8, Unit 3 (The Covenant/Universal House of Justice).

A most significant announcement has come this summer from our Supreme Body, the Universal House of Justice, on 10th July, regarding the adoption of the Badí' Calendar, from which we share a quote below.

The Council looks forward to learning how our teaching efforts are renewed as we learn more about this calendar and, more generally, about weaving patterns of community life that, to ever greater degrees, embody those eternal truths enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh.

"The adoption of a new calendar in each dispensation is a symbol of the power of Divine Revelation to reshape human perception of material, social, and spiritual reality. Through it, sacred moments are distinguished, humanity's place in time and space reimagined, and the rhythm of life recast."

Universal House of Justice

With great humility and abiding love,

The Bahá'í Council for England

Structures in a Cluster

"A cluster advances as more and more capacity for service is developed in a growing number of individuals, who are then assisted to initiate a growing number of interdependent activities that embrace ever-larger numbers of participants. This capacity-building process must, as time goes on, be complemented by an ever more sophisticated system of coordination and support."- (Insights from the Frontiers of Learning)

As the process of growth gathers momentum in a Cluster, certain structures gradually come into being and assist numerical growth. These form the 'Cluster Agencies;'

- **Institute Co-ordinator;** to accompany tutors and enhance quality of the Institute Process
- **Junior Youth (JY) Co-ordinator;** to accompany animators and enhance the quality of JY groups.
- **Children's Class Co-ordinator;** to accompany teachers and enhance quality of Children's Classes
- **Area Teaching Committee (ATC)** to accompany teaching teams, organise spaces for reflection, help spread of devotionals/ firesides, support responsive LSAs and organise teaching campaigns
- **Auxiliary Board Members** who assist and support all of the above structures.
- Co-ordinators are appointed by the Training Institute and the ATCs by the Regional Councils.

Priority Cluster: Suffolk

What Help Is Needed?

"Even if the work begins modestly with the actions of a few enthusiastic believers in a single neighbourhood or village, over time, through a sound institute process, an initial spark can grow into a flame that draws more and more individuals into a unified endeavour"

Insights from the Frontiers of Learning



The Suffolk Coast and Heaths are an 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' and the county borders Cambridgeshire to the west, Norfolk to the north, Essex to the south with the North Sea to the east. Its county town is Ipswich with other important towns including Lowestoft, Bury St Edmunds and Felixstowe which is one of the largest container ports in Europe.

The Bahá'í community is relatively small with about 40 Bahá'ís in total who live in the main in:

- Western Suffolk (Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds area)
- South East (Ipswich/Woodbridge)
- North East (Beccles area)

As with the wider society, some of the friends who have been hugely dedicated and creative in their proclamation of the Faith over the years, are now in the later stages of their lives and the relatively large distances between the believers can translate into

Council for England

The Council for England is a Regional Council that acts under the direction of the National Spiritual Assembly, for teaching and expansion in England, while working closely with the Counsellor, Training Institute and the Auxiliary Board Members in community development work.

The Council carries out the policies of the National Spiritual Assembly and supervises, on behalf of the National Assembly, the smooth and efficient execution of the plans and projects for England.

Individuals serving on the Council for England are elected by members of the Local Spiritual Assemblies and begin their service on the Day of the Covenant .

Share your stories!

Please send in your stories, photos and local and cluster newsletters to bcnewsletter@bahai.org.uk

Contact Secretary

Council Secretary email is: bcsec@gmail.com

difficulties for the whole cluster to meet for activities and cluster reflection meetings.

Considerable efforts are being made by the Assistants and local friends in the Ipswich area to sustain a JY group with the additional goal of initiating a

children's class and one of the local youth has arisen to continue to make her way through the training institute process by attending the summer intensive in Keele.

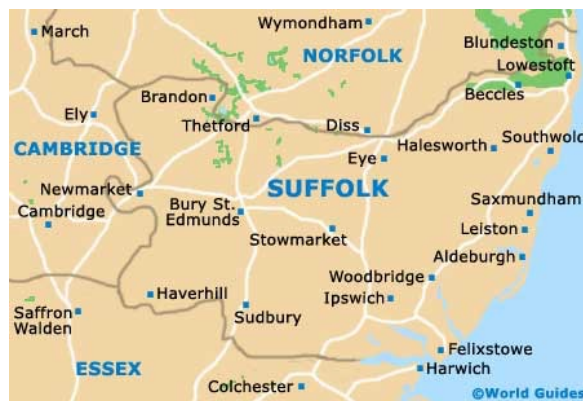
There are also a number of creative approaches being taken in Beccles and Newmarket to reach the wider community with sustained devotional gatherings and Interfaith activities that are very well received. In addition, the Suffolk cluster has benefitted and continues to benefit from consistent support from believers and Assistants in both Cambridgeshire and Norfolk and more recently has had the blessing of pledges from Stella and Geoff Collins and Janet and Andrew Rose to act as visiting teams that will work alongside the Suffolk friends in monthly expansion activity days and other initiatives to develop the training institute process.

So, what is needed to establish a programme of growth? How can you help?

A reading of the current reality of the Suffolk cluster suggests that at this stage, in addition to the significant efforts being made, a pioneer /couple/family who could live in or around Ipswich with some experience in initiating and sustaining a Junior Youth group or Children's classes would greatly support the efforts of the families living there.

Anyone wishing to arise as one of *"several thousand consecrated souls who, spurred on by their love for the Blessed Beauty"* to *"forsake their homes to settle in villages, towns and cities in order to raise to 5,000 the number the number of clusters with programmes of growth"* and to pioneer to Suffolk during these final days of the current Five Year Plan please do not hesitate to contact Manijeh Smith from the

Pioneering Committee manijehs1989@gmail.com or Natasha S. Wilkinson at bcsec@gmail.com



"A new programme of growth begins as two nascent capacities develop. First, one or more friends in a cluster must be able to help individuals study the institute's sequence of courses and accompany them as they initiate core activities. Then, these individuals must be able to attract others to participate in the core activities..."

Insights from the Frontiers of Learning

Teaching Stories

North of England: Cumbria intensive teaching campaign

It wasn't audacity that was required at this stage in the development of the cluster it was subtlety. The visiting team had buckets of the first but to meet local needs happily supplied the latter. The project was fluid with the visiting team changing over the week and some of the local Bahai's only able to be involved for short spurts. But it was intense! There aren't any headline grabbing figures to report; instead, the results are evident in an increased ability to read our reality, a far greater appreciation of the value of accompaniment and an enthusiasm to sustain what has been achieved.

Our ideas about what we would do were fluid too. The goals set by the cluster before the project began were achieved but not in the specific way at first envisaged. We wanted to meet youth, 'older independent' youth who would train as junior youth animators. But we found receptivity in a group who are all just 15. One of the areas we thought to target presented too great a challenge for the capacity of the local resources but reflection on the receptivity already identified, made any outreach there unnecessary anyway.

"I have learnt the need to really evaluate the area you are working with and to assess the needs of what the area can handle. Goals need to be continually reassessed... it can be best to plan as you go as every circumstance is different" Rozita

An event for friends of a local Bahá'í youth was really successful with those invited responding well. Having the event planned in advance allowed time for the visiting team to learn a little about those attending beforehand and to plan the best approach. Reflection afterwards highlighted some fresh goals which were pursued with great love and kindness yielding positive results.



Accompaniment was the hallmark of this project. So beautifully were the local Bahá'ís accompanied that they only really discerned this afterwards. Time invested in building bonds of friendship with local youth and junior youth paid dividends. Experiencing this accompaniment and understanding its true value will enable the local Bahá'ís to practice this themselves with friends and neighbours generating a lasting legacy.

“One of the things we learnt as a whole is empowering the community and strengthening the foundation that have already been laid. Where bonds of friendship and shouldering responsibility were the most important in making our goals and aspirations sustainable.” Carmelia

There was time spent sharpening our understanding of the value of a regular devotional meeting which led to an increased desire to establish one and an appreciation of how to approach people when inviting them. The heightened appreciation of how to move forward knowing that we are engaged in a process was liberating. We won't be so easily disheartened if people we approach do not respond immediately or can't attend a meeting. We have a new perspective on how the process works and the role we can play in building momentum.



“What we think of a project like this is quite different to the reality. There is a need to be patient since results of a project such as this will not be seen overnight” Parnian



The visiting team generated an impetus and stimulated action and don't forget the hammock, the fire pit and the marshmallows! It was exhilarating, exhausting, transformational and great fun. One local Bahá'í wisely summed it up. "The Kendal of last week is not the Kendal of this week."

A community website leads to new teaching and society building opportunities

Our small community had dabbled with the idea of a website for a few years. It took us a long time to finally go live with our simple website but once we did, the seekers started rolling in.

It has only been a few months but already we have had 4 people contact us wanting to know more about the Faith. Our statistics have shown that we have 2-3 visitors to our website every day, most of whom are new visitors not returning visitors.

It has really highlighted to us that there ARE people out there that are incredibly receptive to the Faith. In the 21st century, websites are how people frequently get in touch with others and as a Bahá'í community, we are learning how to utilise this form of communication and have a greater web presence.

The other important part of this story is what happens when a seeker contacts us. We have one person that responds to the emails quickly, we meet up with them and invite them to our community devotional. We always ensure that one person is the main point of contact so those all important bonds of friendship can be built! All of them have many questions, some have been keen to start reading more books and a conceptual presentation of the Faith has frequently been given.

Recently someone interested in the Faith, contacted our community. We met up with them and gave them a prayer book and an introduction to the Bahá'í Faith. They were soon invited to attend the community devotional. Since then, one member of the community, has been regularly meeting up with them and building bonds of friendship, accompanying them on their journey towards Bahá'u'lláh. Independently, they have started saying obligatory prayers and have been very moved by the suffering of Bahá'u'lláh.

This new friend is now starting Book 1 in the coming weeks and is very excited to study and build capacity to pray and serve!

Summer Expansion in Hackney, London

Hackney has been home to me for most of my life – I've seen the good and not so great sides of the social conditions here, and have always been attentive to the needs of young people. After attending the London Youth Conference last year, I knew I would want to eventually get involved, and the summer expansion was the right time to do so.

"This should be easy," I thought. "I'm from the area, I get along with people, and I understand the challenges and social forces they face – what could possibly go wrong?" I definitely got my answer.

My first weeks I spent asking young people what they wanted to see changed in the area, and what they liked. Without being aware, almost all of their answers would point to improving the areas

reputation: sadly, my estate was home to some of the most notorious criminals in the 70's, and a spate of gun crime in more recent years. What the youth didn't seem to realise, was that as young people, they have the greatest influence on how the area can make these improvements, and I found a lot of the conversations we had helped them discover this.

Assisted by a number of friends in my community, we put together an open day where we played interactive games, explained the JY program, and showed a video about a JY group in Canada. It was a great window of opportunity to really drive the concept of a JY group home, and understand whether the Junior Youth felt it would reflect their previously discussed ideas.

Over the course of the expansion, we spoke to a combined total of around 40 youth/junior youth. 15 junior youth attended our open day. Alongside another member of the community and fellow Bahá'í friend, I now animate a Junior Youth Program, with 5 participants. Easy? No. But I regularly see and speak to the majority of the others we interacted with, and I hope to continue expanding our group in the future.

I'm proud to be part of my community, and hope I can serve in helping unite our area to change its reputation going forward.

Learning about the Five Year Plan 2011-2016

What is a program of growth? - A story from Norfolk

"A new programme of growth begins as two nascent capacities develop. First, one or more friends in a cluster must be able to help individuals study the institute's sequence of courses and accompany them as they initiate core activities. Then, these individuals must be able to attract others to participate in the core activities..."

Insights Into The Frontiers of Learning

In a low-lying county in the East of England, bordering Lincolnshire to the North and west, Cambridgeshire to the southwest and Suffolk to the south, the Norfolk cluster was blessed by the dedicated service of one or two friends who diligently laboured over many years to tutor and accompany large groups of believers in both Norfolk and Suffolk through the sequence of courses.

These sacrificial efforts led to a solid body of believers ready to advance this work and able to permeate the devotional character of the cluster



with up to 5-7 devotionals that consistently infused the Divine Fragrances of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation into the community.

In subsequent years, a core group of adult believers went on to train as animators of the Junior Youth Empowerment programme which gave rise to a steady flow of junior youth (from both the Bahá'í and wider communities) making their way through the programme and graduating as youth to the Ruhi Institute's sequence of courses.

During this time, a young, seeking soul (a school friend of one of the Bahá'í youth) arose to take her place in the community building enterprise by assisting in the animation of a neighbourhood junior youth group. In March 2013 she



confirmed her belief in Bahá'u'lláh whilst continuing to make her way through the sequence of courses, joined by her mother (who has also joyfully arisen to assist with a fledgling children's class). Her younger brother was also invited to be part of these nascent community building efforts and is now an active and dedicated member of the neighbourhood junior youth group). In turn, all four local Bahá'í youth have arisen to closely accompany the process described and have been involved in supporting and running junior youth groups and youth devotionals and 'spiritual cinemas'. These endeavours are now drawing from an ever-expanding 'community of interest' who are able to assist in the preparation and running of these gatherings.

Since returning from last year's hugely galvanising Warwick Youth Conference and this year's equally confirming East of England mini conference (at which two of the Norfolk youth were facilitators) these youth and junior youth are learning what it is to "steel themselves for a life of service"[1] and have continued to contribute to the organisation and running of two junior youth camps that have helped to deepen the commitment and understanding of the junior youth in the cluster.

The commitment of the Norfolk cluster as a whole to the community building process is strong, as the friends continue to accompany others through the sequence of institute courses in diverse settings: from the neighbourhood to the field of chaplaincy work, where participants have, through invitation, come to accept Bahá'u'lláh's message. In addition, there are opportunities to engage a wider circle of friends in direct and meaningful conversations at a successful direct teaching event that takes place every three months. This event, based in Norwich city library, continues to expand in its scope and the friends and cluster agencies are working to understand how it can become part of integrated lines of action during more intensive expansion phases born of effective consolidation

contributing increasingly to a “rich and intricate pattern of life” [2].

In January 2014 the Norfolk cluster at its cluster reflection meeting carefully deepened on the guidance that details the two nascent capacities that are in evidence when reaching the first milestone. In consultation with the Auxiliary Board member and the cluster agencies, the friends concluded that in reading the reality of their cluster they had indeed established a programme of growth and reached the first milestone!



The focus from here, will undoubtedly be to build on a “particular rhythm of community life” [3] as the cluster learns what a community that “continues to grow” and a “burst of expansion experienced as a result of intense action; the necessary period of consolidation during which increases in ranks are fortified” [4] might look like.



[1] 8th February 2013 from the Universal House of Justice

[2] Ridvan 2013 from the Universal House of Justice

[3] 12th December 2011 from the Universal House of Justice

[4] Ibid

Bulletin Board Update for the 10 Priority Clusters

1. Dorset

The imminent move of a veteran believer part-time to Wareham promises to lend significant impetus to the efforts of the friends in Dorset to move towards the first milestone. The initial plan, formed in consultation with the institutions serving the area, is to focus efforts in the "triangle" formed by Wareham, Bridport and Lychett Matravers. A visiting team from Thames Valley have been identified to work with the Dorset friends, visiting for a full-weekend each month to support efforts underway.

2. Solent

A Local Spiritual Assembly from Greater London has offered to assist the work in the North-East of the cluster; efforts are being made to assemble a group of individuals to form a team in the South-East Hants area. Solent youth would benefit from sustained accompaniment by visiting youth teams

3. Suffolk

A youth attended the East of England mini conference and Intensive Training over the summer; Increasing coordination and monthly activity days supported by two visiting teams have energised and raised spirits; Suffolk would greatly benefit from a pioneer family to arise and move to Ipswich to help focus on the establishment of a programme of growth

4. Cumbria

Benefitted from invigorating summer teaching project led by youth from Manchester - continued support for pioneer family's efforts to initiate and sustain JY would be of great value

5. Isle of Man

Hot off the press... during the recent tutor training in Keele, a few friends were moved to arise and assist with the establishment of a programme of growth on the Island. Are you moved to arise and pioneer for a short term to help with the expansion of the faith?

Bulletin Board Update for the 10 Priority Clusters

6. Devon

Would you like to assist the efforts of the friends in Devon as a visiting teacher or join together with a team, to initiate one or two of the core activities? Such assistance would be greatly appreciated!

7. The Channel Islands

Are there any souls who have had the opportunity to develop their skills through the hosting of devotionals, tutoring study circles, training tutors, conducting children's classes, animating junior youth groups and would now arise to the challenge of pioneering to the Channel Islands- thereby allowing the Divine Fragrances of the Blessed Beauty to reach all the inhabitants of the Islands of Jersey and Guernsey?

8. Lincolnshire

Monthly activity days in Lincoln supported by visiting tutors from neighbouring clusters have provided focus and impetus to fledging activities. Would greatly benefit from a pioneer individual or family to focus on developing an existing neighbourhood children's class and engaging parents in the Training Institute Process. Lincoln University is a worthy consideration for Youth thinking about university applications <http://www.lincoln.ac.uk/>

9. North and East Yorkshire

This Cluster is close to launching a program of growth with youth involved in outreach and the first book of the Institute Course shortly starting with youth from the wider community. Are there any friends who could support these nascent activities or start new ones in this Cluster?

10. Cornwall:

Cornwall is blessed to have a very talented and creative group of believers who are well loved and respected in the wider community. Are there any souls who would arise to form part of visiting teams to assist fledging efforts to initiate and sustain a JY group and consolidate further movement through the training institute process?