

# LIVING NATION

## The Bahá'í Council Newsletter

### **Beloved Coworkers in the field of service,**

The Bahá'í Council for England is moved to dedicate the relaunching of the 'Living Nation' to the example set by the deeply loved seven members of the 'Yaran', who have entered their sixth year of incarceration and to their fellow believers who have all "suffered grievously from the arrows of religious fanaticism"



Our Supreme Body in their soul-stirring and majestic letter addressed to the Bahá'ís of Iran, highlight the poignant example set by our dearly loved brethren. The exemplary standard that they have upheld in the face of cruel and unfounded persecution has won the respect, trust, and gradual allegiance of their fellow countrymen in Iran and the admiration of countless more from far flung corners of the globe - powerfully demonstrating what our beloved Guardian describes, that

"One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely, the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh"

As we move into the 'current stage in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan' the Council for England wishes to humbly call upon every believer of the Greatest Name to resolve to win similar distinction, respect and influence in their interactions with their families, friends, coworkers and neighbourhoods. To elevate every conversation, to remove every barrier, to embrace every soul in order that we too might:

“ Tear asunder the veils, remove the obstacles, proffer the life- giving waters  
and point out the path of salvation”

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 Agency;'

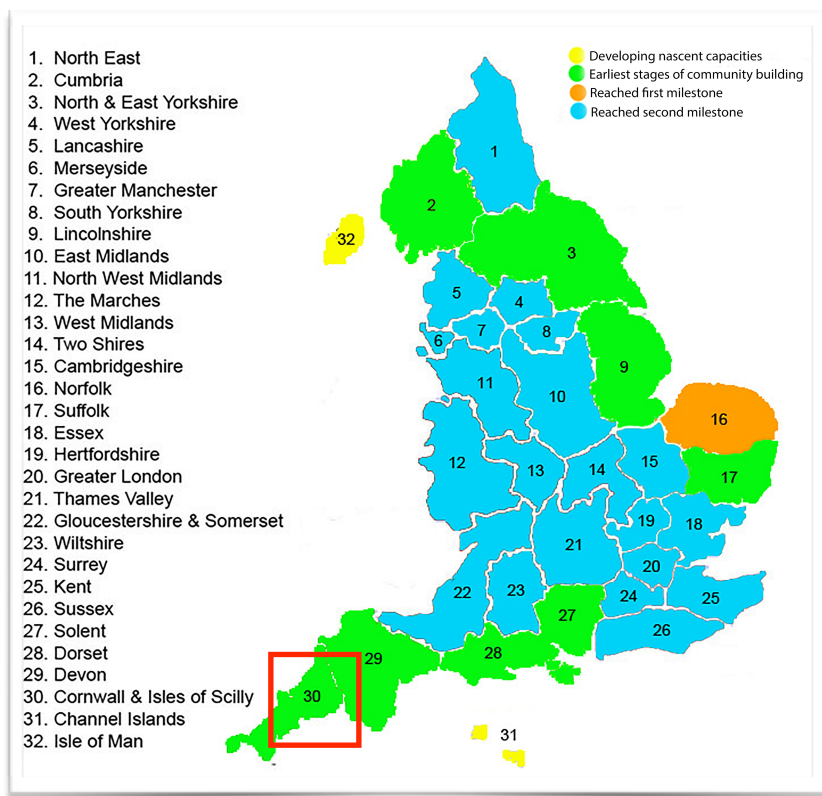
- **Institute Co-ordinator;** to accompany tutors and enhance quality of the Institute Process
- **Junior Youth (JY) Co-ordinator;** to accompany animators and enhance quality of JY groups.
- **Children's Class Co-ordinator;** to accompany teachers and enhance quality of Children's Classes
- **Area Teaching 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.

## Establishing a programme of growth in the remaining years of the Plan

By the first day of Riḍván, 2016, every one of England's 32 clusters must have a programme of growth, which means that they have reached the first milestone spoken of by the Universal House of Justice, in its message of *28th December 2010*:

*"we will call upon the community of the Most Great Name at Riḍván 2011 to raise over the next five years the total number of clusters in which a programme of growth is under way, at whatever level of intensity, to 5,000, approximately one third of all clusters in the world at present."*

### Priority Cluster: Cornwall



Each edition, we will focus on a cluster which must establish a programme of growth during the coming two years. In this edition, we will be looking at Cornwall.

Cornwall (marked "30" on the map above), is the most South-Westerly county of England, with very long coastlines bordering

the Bristol Channel to the North and the English Channel to the South.

Nowadays mostly a tourist area, Cornwall also has an impressive industrial heritage, based upon china clay, tin and copper; and an inshore fishing industry.

The first Bahá'í in Cornwall was Daniel Jenkyn, who following a conversation with Miss Dorothy Hodgson on a train to London, soon became an enthusiastic follower of Bahá'u'lláh around 1910.

Another notable Bahá'í in Cornwall was the famous potter, Bernard Leach, a committed Bahá'í that lived in St Ives for many years founding a famous pottery school.

There is a small and welcoming Bahá'í community in Cornwall that is distinguished by its warmth and creative qualities. It would greatly benefit from a pioneer family that could support nascent core activities, particularly the Training Institute Process and fledgling efforts to initiate and sustain a Junior Youth program.

The other 7 priority clusters in need of home-front pioneers, to assist in launching programs of growth, will be featured in future issues of *Living Nation*.

These are Cumbria, North & East Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Suffolk, Solent, Dorset and Devon.

If any of the friends are considering pioneering to Cornwall or any of the other priority Clusters or would simply like to know more, please email the Pioneering Committee at: [pioneering@bahai.org.uk](mailto:pioneering@bahai.org.uk)

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## Teaching Stories

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### Lone youth arises in Northern Priority Cluster

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Last year I found out I was moving to university in a priority cluster - a cluster that currently does not have a program of growth - and initially I was very scared about the change of environment.

Previously, I lived in a very vibrant community, where many youth throughout the whole cluster systematically served together, and this new cluster was a complete contrast.

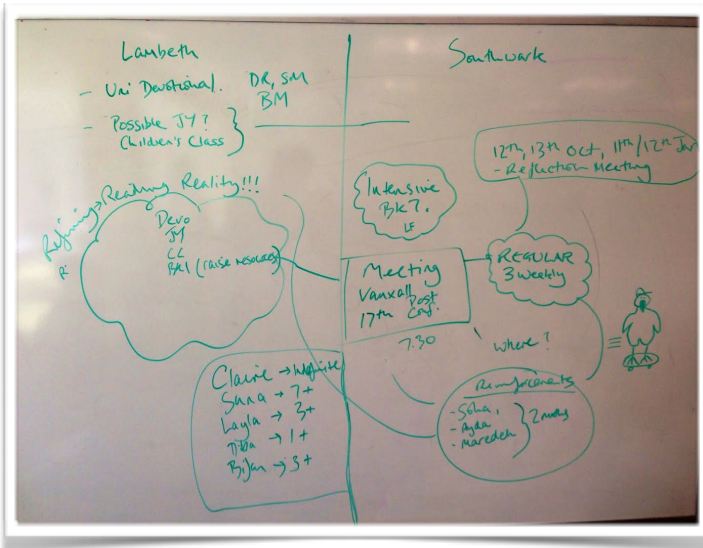
Inspired by the vision from the guidance of the Universal House of Justice; e.g. “opportunities afforded by the personal circumstances of the believers initially involved—or perhaps a single homefront pioneer—to enter into meaningful and distinctive conversation with local residents dictate how the process of growth begins in a cluster,” and galvanised by the youth conference, I arrived at university and decided to take small steps to walk the path of service in a new area. The first step I took, was to identify a neighbourhood by researching the different neighbourhoods and then walking around a neighbourhood that was close to the university. I soon began having conversations with a few people that lived there about what it was like to live in this neighbourhood, the social forces which they could see acting on young people and the things they wanted to improve in their neighbourhood. The people I met were warm, and although the neighbourhood was quite different to anywhere else I had served in, I felt a sense of receptivity to the idea of change in their community.

I tried to go alone to neighbourhood as often as I could, so whenever I was free I would walk down to the neighbourhood and started to talk to youth who may be interested in training to serve as an animator of junior youth groups. I did this for around 4 months, and met a number of youth that seemed interested, however I found it very challenging to follow up with their initial interest.

One reason for this was a lack of opportunity to reflect with others; something that is very challenging when you are serving alone in a neighbourhood. Then, a turning point came after I spoke to my Auxiliary Board members about the challenges, helping me to systematise when I would outreach e.g. once a week on a Saturday - so that every few weeks, a visiting youth would come and accompany me to meet new friends and visit those previously interested. The Local Spiritual Assembly also met with me twice, having had little experience with outreach or community building activities in a neighbourhood and subsequently, 5 members undertook Book 5 and completed it recently, and a couple of members accompanied me on outreach a few times. After 8 months of making small efforts to speak to people in a neighbourhood, more of the community began to take an active role, in their own way, to further the process of development. Service in this neighbourhood has also aided personal teaching efforts with friends at university, and has helped to establish a devotional amongst some friends.

Throughout this time, there have been many tests, and without reliance on prayers, supplicating God's unfailing assistance, none of the small steps would have taken place. I have begun to recognise that each time a crisis takes place in the field of service, it plants the seeds and develops the capacity for future victories to prevail.

## Youth Conference inspires fresh community building



Plans made at Youth Conference

A nascent Junior Youth group, a subsequent Children's Class, and the promise of future activities in a vibrant and receptive neighbourhood; the Bermondsey neighbourhood in South-East London is going from strength to strength.

The London Youth Conference, August 2013, lay the foundations for spiritual bounties that have been experienced in this area by providing a space within which individuals, with the common goal

of contributing to constructive change in their communities and building an ever-advancing civilisation, could come together and share their thoughts. The conference was also an opportunity for participants to consult on the practical elements involved in such an endeavour. Aside from

conceptual discussions, the way in which the youth were split into groups, according to their home area, provided an opportunity for consultation on how such community-building efforts were to go forward. Such practical topics included the availability of the youth, the realities of the areas within which they lived, and the experience they already had in certain activities.

The neighbourhood of Bermondsey was identified by the youth's small group facilitator as a receptive area to begin to have conversations with the local residents. The sustainability of activities was made a primary consideration, and with a resident Bahá'í family already in the area and the knowledge that the majority of the group would be able to serve there for at least three years, Bermondsey was considered an ideal place and thus plans for growth were put into place before the end of the youth conference.



Crafts from Children's Class

Encouraged by the bonds of friendship forged during the youth conference, the first thing to do was find a venue for a Junior Youth group. After consulting with the resident Bahá'í family, it came to light that there was a highly popular and trusted youth centre in the area. Securing it for a weekly basis has proved invaluable in giving families a familiar setting within which their children could engage in this exciting new group.

Having established friendships with a few families in the community through regular home visits, the need for a Children's Class in the area became apparent, as younger siblings persistently asked '*When can I join the group?*'. Through mutual support and accompaniment, the core team of friends involved in the area were able to decide how best to use the available resources to make this a reality, and home visits have now become a family affair, with younger and older members all involved alike and parents encouraging their children in their efforts.

Taking advantage of the intensity in the expansion phases, the process of regular action, consultation and reflection has been key to systematically nurturing the activities and ensuring that they remain sustainable. The Junior Youth group is progressing not only in numbers but also in its spiritual character, with the participants forming friendships and the group developing its moral identity. Much of the same can be said of the Children's Class, as facilitators often find it difficult to get all the enthusiastic participants to wrap up discussions and activities on time!

Whilst it has not been without its difficulties, the process of community-building in Bermondsey has been filled with confirmations and blessings, and there is no doubt that it will continue to thrive as it works towards building capacity in the indigenous population.



## Individual initiative: *Tiny Planet* fireside

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Originating in Washington, D.C. on the East Coast of the United States, an exciting monthly arts gathering has made its way to England! *Tiny Planet* had its start in 2005, when I moved to D.C. and was inspired by my new space, which was a large old commercial loft above a furniture store in an up-and-coming urban neighbourhood, just steps away from one of the places 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke in 1912.

The loft was the home of my recording studio; '*It's Not Rocket Science Studios*', where I specialised in producing Bahá'í artists. I started a weekly musical devotional to make use of the studio and the Bahá'í talents that flowed through it, but the weekly effort was poorly attended and exhausting and unsustainable as an individual effort.

Still inspired by the vision of a regular arts event, I took the idea to the next Cluster Reflection Gathering. D.C. was already a thriving cluster, fully engaged in its program of growth. We were split into groups and encouraged to consult about increasing activities in our neighbourhoods. One of the areas of focus was on *firesides*, which had dwindled in number as other core activities were prioritised. Our small discussion group formed a teaching team on the spot and committed to re-framing my idea into a musical fireside to meet the current goals of our cluster. Team *Tiny Planet* was born, and then ....the magic started to happen!

Through systematic consultation, experimentation, reflection and a spirit of learning, and with amazing support from the LSA and a steady stream of both Bahá'í and other local artists, the format of the monthly e dinner-party-house-concert-fireside-dance-party was refined and honed. Its primary goal was to attract, uplift, and widen the community of interest that would be gently and lovingly invited to core activities.



Elevated conversations during a break

We met as a team to pray and reflect regularly on what worked and didn't work. We found ways of optimising the talents and resources of our 6-member team: two people to shop and cook, one person to drive them around, one to manage the electronic invitation list and RSVPs, one to prepare the short introduction for the evening, and me to prepare the venue and schedule the artists. We found that cooking dinner for people (rather than pot-luck) was fundamentally important, as was keeping it free of charge for guests. We found that it needed to be on Saturday to give us time to prepare. We

found it was important for the artists to talk and share thoughts and inspiration behind their work rather than just "performing." We kept careful count of the ratio of Bahá'ís to external community (always aiming for 50/50) – this seemed to provide the optimum environment that was just "Bahá'í" enough to provide first-time guests with the loving spirit of the community. Bahá'ís could count on it

## Council for England

The Council for England is a Regional Council and 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.

Like England, other regions i.e. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, also have a Regional Council, that are elected by members of Local Spiritual Assemblies and start work on the Day of the Covenant each year.

### Share your stories!

Please send in your stories, photos and local and cluster newsletters to  
[bcnewsletter@bahai.org.uk](mailto:bcnewsletter@bahai.org.uk)

### Current Members

Ronnie Y. Bindra (Chair)  
 Naghme Fozdar  
 Homa Saadat  
 Ramez Salmanpour (Treasurer)  
 Farhad Shahbahrami  
 David Smith  
 Olinga Tahzib (Vice-Chair)  
 Stephen Vickers  
 Natasha S. Wilkinson (Secretary)

Email: [bce@bahai.org.uk](mailto:bce@bahai.org.uk)

always to be a safe place to bring their friends, especially to introduce them to the Faith for the first time.

Once we aligned with the Plan, Tiny Planet exploded quickly! News spread far and wide – so many people would come that we were forced to institute a rule that Bahá'ís could only attend if they brought at least one non-Bahá'í friend. Over the next four years, we hosted every Bahá'í musician who came through town (and some who came specifically for TP), including many names you'd likely recognise. For Andy Grammer's offering, so many people were crammed into the loft that they flowed down the stairs and out into the alley. We eventually had to assign someone on the team the sole responsibility of standing at the door to screen the curious people who wanted to join in the fun from off the street.

Many started Ruhi Book 1 at Tiny Planet, as well as Children's Classes and Devotionals. The Washington D.C. LSA was infinitely encouraging and supportive and Tiny Planet became a useful tool for its intended purpose. Although we lost the loft when I moved to England in 2010 and membership of the team has changed, our fireside is still alive in D.C. in cafes and homes around town.

Now, Tiny Planet has come to England! We have so far hosted three TPs at the new Lewes, UK home of It's Not Rocket Science Studios featuring music, film, photography, art installations and millinery contributions by artists from the UK, Canada, and Sweden, and featuring delicious food cooked not only by Bahá'ís, but with the help of other friends and neighbours. After these initial successful tests of the format, we are now engaged in a search for committed Tiny Planet London team members (especially cooks, people who can offer rides, people who would like to contribute financial resources for food and artists, and people to help host on the evenings). We are also continually seeking to consult with institutions and agencies to ensure that the event serves the needs and special strengths of the time and place and Plan. Perhaps here it will be a devotional rather than a fireside, or a Junior Youth/Youth hosted event. Who knows what wonders England will bring to Tiny Planet and Tiny Planet will bring to England!

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 Learning about the Five Year Plan 2011-2016
 

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**“So tell me about these milestones?”**

**“In the 28th December, 2010 Message, the Universal House of Justice describes several milestones that are passed, as a Cluster grows and gains capacity. Excerpts are shared below”**

**Milestone**


**1**

“in whatever combination and however small in number, devotional gatherings, children’s classes and junior youth groups are being maintained by those progressing through the sequence of institute courses and committed to the vision of individual and collective transformation they foster. This initial flow of human resources into the field of systematic action marks the **first of several milestones** in a process of sustainable growth.”

**2**

“Within this landscape of unfolding processes, emerging structures, and enduring fellowship, that moment which has come to be known as the “launching” of an intensive programme of growth represents conscious recognition that all the elements necessary to accelerate the expansion and consolidation of the Faith are not only in place but also functioning with an adequate degree of effectiveness. It signals the maturation of an ever-expanding, self-sustaining system for the spiritual edification of a population: a steady stream of friends is proceeding through the courses of the training institute and engaging in the corresponding activities, which serves, in turn, to increase the number of fresh recruits into the Faith, a significant percentage of whom invariably enters the institute process, guaranteeing the expansion of the system. **This constitutes another milestone** that the friends labouring in every cluster must, in time, reach.”