

NEWS AND
NOTES FROM
THE FIELD

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EVERY

Cluster

needs a

Program

of

Growth!

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LEARNING IN ACTION



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What is your Cluster's Growth Program?

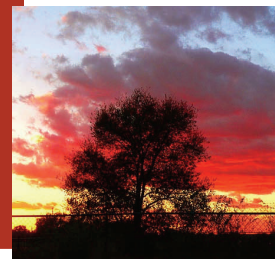
While "A" clusters are engaged in **intensive** programs of growth, all clusters need programs of growth. The International Teaching Center in its 28 November 2004 message states;

"Long before a cluster attains the stage of development and collective consciousness for initiating and sustaining an intensive program of growth, the believers in the institute process should be assisted to step into the arena of action ... Believers who have completed the second course should be immediately deployed in home visits, and those who have studied the book on effective teaching need not wait until the cluster is an "A" to form a teaching team. What some friends often require, particularly in urban areas, is access to a receptive population that might yield contacts for the core activities and, furthermore, the confidence to approach non-Baha'is. Efforts to make lists and invite friends, family, neighbors, and co-workers have been fruitful, but for many Baha'is these lists may soon become exhausted and it becomes necessary to look beyond their limited circle."

The core teams in cluster after cluster have been implementing the pattern of activities suggested in the 28 November 2004 letter of the International Teaching Centre. This approach has brought in its wake a renewed spirit of teaching and service. The multiplication of core activities is accelerated. Teaching teams are learning how to integrate the lines of action. The pattern that is emerging is that home visits to the receptive neighborhoods offering children classes results in closer bonds of love and fel-

lowship among the parents and the Bahá'ís. Parents overjoyed by witnessing the transformation of their children, the prayers they hear their children chant, the songs they hear their children sing, and the genuine love they receive from Bahá'í teachers, become interested in learning more about the Faith. The teaching teams share Anna's presentation with the parents. Many decide to join a devotional gathering. Some like to join a study circle and yet there are others who immediately recognize the Message and declare their Faith in Bahá'u'lláh.

Albuquerque Cluster has identified two receptive neighborhoods where friends are supporting each other in "serried lines" teaching children, holding devotionals. and tutoring study circles



Albuquerque Sunset

One particular day really showed the enthusiasm of the children for their lessons. The teacher who had signed up to teach the class showed up about an hour early to start inviting the children, but bad weather meant there were no children in the playground. Since it was about to rain, she was invited to the house of the Bahá'í family there to wait it out. As she was waiting, other Bahá'ís showed up and said that on their way to the apartment, a couple kids stopped them, in the rain, to ask if there was class today and agreed that they could have the class at their house rather than outside to avoid the rain.

This led to home visits with a couple of the parents to talk about the classes, and by the time that was over, the rain had stopped and we could have the class outside as planned. The children who participated were asked for their apartment number so that their parents could be visited the next day.

The weekly schedule of children's classes in the evening followed by devotional/firesides at night continued to work well. The kids remained excited about coming to class, even knocking on the door of the Bahá'í family, making sure there was class that day! Several home visits were done, and on Wednesday we had our first verbal declaration by one of the mothers.

Home Visit Campaigns in B Stage Clusters, San Jose, CA!

The Regional Baha'i Council of the Southwestern States is committed to establish 60 Intensive Programs of Growth by the end of the current Five Year Plan in the Southwestern Region.

The Auxiliary Board member shares the following story.

In San Jose Cluster a Bahá'í friend was eager to begin a neighborhood devotional gathering in her home. She approached her cluster institute coordinator to accompany her in visiting her neighbors at their homes and inviting them to the devotionals. The cluster institute coordinator overjoyed by such an invitation also invited the Auxiliary Board members to join them in this effort. The friends involved in this teaching project share their story and lessons learned below.

"We met in the morning, prayed together, discussed what we would do and how. The Bahá'í friend whose neighborhood was the focus of the day's activity was getting more and more anxious. With more prayers and much positive encouragement she felt good and we set out.

We visited 46 homes, 28 of which had people at home and whom we engaged in discussion.

Of the 28, 13 were receptive to the idea of a neighborhood devotional and thought that it was a good initiative and were open to receiving a reminder visit on the night before the devotional. Of the 13, 3 were so receptive to the Faith that we could have actually engaged them with the introduction to Anna's presentation right there if we had been prepared to do so.

At the start of the visits the Bahá'í friend was nervous and had a hard time even standing by the door as we introduced her and her invitation. By the end, she was engaging her neighbors and even teaching them on the spot as a response to their questions. Her resolve was indeed steeled through her experience and the confirmations she witnessed first hand. We plan to accompany her with the first devotional at the least, to offer a Book 3 lesson for the children, and to help her follow-up on opportunities for home visits to share the Faith.

"It is important that ... the process of human resource development does not become an end in itself, one that allows them to postpone the act of teaching until some future time."

International Teaching Centre, 28 Nov 2004

Some things that we learned for the next time we set out to accompany such an effort:

- Neighbors were immediately put at ease when she introduced herself as their neighbor right next door.
- Neighbors were put at ease when she shared that the devotional would be at her home and not a church or such.
- Neighbors responded very well to the portion of the invitation where we shared that the purpose of the devotional meeting included bringing the neighbors together and to help form bonds of fellowship between them and to foster community. Many stated that they did not even know their neighbors and that they wished it was otherwise
- The most receptive neighbors were the Hispanics, and having a Spanish flyer and a Spanish speaking person in our team was invaluable.
- Receptivity is so high that we must always be prepared to offer Anna's presentation. Even when the question "what is Bahá'í?" is asked, we can share the first paragraph of Anna's presentation, with the quote, from memory as a response instead of using our own words to answer the question. Next time we will review Anna's presentation before we set out, even if our primary purpose is to invite them to a devotional meeting.
- Even friends with fear and trepidation will arise if we accompany them effectively.

Teaching in Monterey - Even C Clusters Do Home Visits!

A teaching team in Monterey Cluster which was accompanied by the members of the cluster core team shares the story of their home visit to the home of a seeker.

"We had the name and the address of a seeker that had come through the 800 number but no phone number. We noticed that the address was in some of the newer, more affluent neighborhoods of the city. So we said some prayers and went looking for the home committed to find the seeker!

When we found the number it was a gated community, fortunately, open. We went up and up a hill and the houses got bigger and more luxurious. We came to another gate, but this one was closed. We dialed the name and a voice answered. Shortly we discovered he was the person interested in learning more about the Faith. He buzzed us in and said he would wait for us at the end of the driveway. Our host was 15 years of age, a sophomore in high school. He said his mom taught him that since he was born into privilege, he is required to give back. He has read some books, read on the Internet and spoken with an English teacher whom he said, used to be a Bahá'í. During our conversation his mother came home, and with a shocked look on her face asked, "Who are these people?" We introduced ourselves and she seemed to relax a little. At any rate, the young man expressed an interest in joining a study circle. It was like talking to someone with a college education so it was cute when he said, "I don't drive, can I get a ride to the study circle?" We exchanged contact information and said good bye!

I think our biggest learning today was that the size of the house and the number of gates required to get in are not indicators of the accessibility for home visits nor of the receptivity of the inhabitants of these homes. Cold visits (without a phone call) are also an option if one does it with genuine concern for the individual's time and desire to speak to us.

"Where this framework has been applied coherently in all its dimensions in a cluster, steady progress is being achieved, both in terms of the participation of the believers and their friends in community life and in terms of numerical growth..."

Universal House of Justice, Ridvan 2007

Teaching Teams in San Diego Focus on Receptive Neighborhoods

A number of teaching teams in San Diego Cluster are focusing their resources on the two receptive neighborhoods identified by the cluster agencies. They are discovering in practical terms the different dimensions of the framework. One of the teams shares its discovery as the importance of inviting the seekers to declare their Faith in Baha'u'llah.

"At our newly initiated children class a mother came with her children. She had come previously to a gathering and when we talked to her about the Bahá'í Faith she said, I love the idea of unity and I really want something like this for my children. Well, today she brought her children to the children's class and she

was sitting outside talking to our newest Bahá'í in this neighborhood. When the class was over our new Bahá'í called out to me "are only Baha'is allowed to go to Feast?" Feast was two days away. I explained that anyone who believed that Baha'u'llah was the Messenger of God for today and who wished to follow His laws and obey His administrative order is a Bahá'í and could definitely come to Feast. Then the seeker said "sign me up!" When I brought her the card she said, "I was wondering what I had to do to join. Did I have to be baptized? Whatever is needed, I want to do it. I'm in!" She then said, "before I met the Bahá'ís, I felt as if I was the only one who believed all of this." We have another new Bahá'í in this neighborhood now!"

"We especially appeal to our fellow Baha'is everywhere to mount a mightier effort than ever before in offering the Message of Baha'u'llah to increasing numbers of their compatriots, and in inviting them to investigate and embrace His Cause."

Universal House of Justice

In the Southwestern Region the number of neighborhood children classes in cluster after cluster is on the rise and valuable insights are gained. Below is a brief summary of the lessons learned:



Neighborhood Children Classes in a Receptive Neighborhood in San Diego



- Bahá'í children who participate in invitation home visits and are part of the neighborhood children classes form a strong Bahá'í identity and are transformed to teachers of the Cause.
- Where trained resources reach out, door to door, to children in receptive neighborhoods and establish regular children classes with the larger community teaching becomes a natural way of life. The response is highly positive, encouraging the teachers. The courage that this process instills in the teachers is priceless.
- Establishing a strong relationship with the parents of children is essential to sustainability of children classes. After the children are engaged in children's classes, home visits with the family then should focus on what the children are learning.
- Students are integrating what they have learned into everyday life. For example one child self-corrected herself saying, "That is not a kindly heart." Another child when his friend could not find her lost key told the teacher, "We need to have a prayer."
- Picking up and dropping off the children back home is the key to relationship building with their families and integration of core activities.
- The closer the class is held to the home of the seekers the higher their participation.
- Deployment of mothers as teachers of children classes has been an effective strategy. They see themselves as the mother of ALL the children in the neighborhood, not just their children.
- Follow closely the lesson plans as laid out in the Ruhi Books.
- The children are the best instruments, inviting their friends and neighbors to come!



"Classes for the spiritual education of children and junior youth serve to strengthen the roots of the Faith in the local population."

Universal House of Justice 27 December 2005

San Diego Junior Youth Group in Action !

Friends in Greater Tucson Cluster Learn Home Prices and Receptivity Are NOT Correlated!

About 40 friends gathered in the cluster for the **Teach: Just Do It Campaign**. Everyone participated in a Book 3 and Book 6 refresher with particular emphasis on implementing neighborhood home visits. With the encouragement of our Auxiliary Board members, 23 friends went out immediately following the gathering to do home visits.

In one neighborhood where the homes are worth an average of \$1 million and the walk between each home takes at least 5 minutes, the Bahá'í living there realized that there was no need for her to deprive herself of the getting to know her neighbors just because of the "distances and remoteness" of the homes. She and her team members went out in 100 degree heat to visit the neighbors and have continued to do so several times since. The response for devotionals and children's classes was amazing! She and her husband are now having a very successful devotional at their home composed of her neighbors every week. She tells us, "If we can do it - ANYBODY CAN! I don't know how to thank you for delivering to me this important message from the Universal House of Justice - and for all the wonderful quotes that I meditate on daily! My mind set is so

changed...Praise God!"

In another team several youth had been training all summer to start children's classes. After their consultation in the morning, the youth and several others descended on an apartment complex where a Bahá'í family had requested children's classes. In less than 30 minutes, they found 11 homes with children who were excited to attend the children's classes and 2 homes that would like to have simple devotionals in their home.

At another neighborhood, the need for children's classes was so great that they had to start immediately. They have several non Bahá'í children in attendance on a weekly basis.

Other communities heard about the success of these home visits and they too continued the momentum in their neighborhoods. Again and again we hear about the enthusiastic response we are getting by simply offering a service of Bahá'í children's classes, Bahá'í junior youth groups, and devotionals. Our neighbors are longing for a sense of community and we are ready to provide it for them in a spirit of spiritual friendship.

"... success would depend "on the manner in which lines of action are integrated and on the attitude of learning that is adopted."

Building Momentum, April 2003

A member of a teaching team in San Francisco cluster shares her home visit story with a 28 year old, agnostic friend.

He invited us in and responded excitedly to Anna's presentation. His friend was helping to clean his kitchen and pretended to stay in the kitchen, but he kept coming out to listen, and then secretly passed us a note with his phone and address telling us to come visit him too when we had more time. He seems interested in being with a positive community here in the city. Both guys are definitely interested in learning more and coming to the devotions.

Learning In Action is a publication of the Regional Bahá'í Council of the Southwestern States, © 2007.

To contact **Learning in Action** please email: newsletter@rbcsw.org

The Regional Bahá'í Council of the Southwestern States has committed to establishing 60 Intensive Programs of Growth (IPGs) before the end of the current Five Year Plan (2011). There are now 10 IPGs established in the Southwestern region. The purpose of this publication is to share experiences of clusters from across the region to accelerate our collective learning and the advancement of the process of entry by troops.