



A junior youth group in Chimoio, Malawi.

Initiating and Sustaining a Programme of Growth

In diverse settings across far-flung regions of the globe, the friends have been learning to initiate and sustain new programmes of growth. Among the different ways in which communities reached “the first of several milestones in a process of sustainable growth”,¹⁰ a few simple actions were widely embraced: deploying and supporting homefront pioneers, drawing on the assistance of neighbouring communities, mobilizing youth, and working with resident believers. Often, several approaches were used in combination to attain the dynamics of a programme of growth. By the end of the Five Year Plan, the community of the Greatest Name had added some 3,000 programmes of growth to the 2,000 that were established in previous Plans—an indication of the “systematic, determined,

and selfless action”¹¹ taken by the followers of Bahá’u’lláh to spread the Cause of God among the peoples of the world.

Homefront Pioneers

At the outset of the Five Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice noted that “the successful prosecution of the Plan will require the services of several thousand consecrated souls who, spurred on by their love for the Blessed Beauty, will forsake their homes to settle in villages, towns and cities in order to raise to 5,000 the number of clusters with programmes of growth”.¹² The believers rose to meet the challenge, as some 5,000 friends wholeheartedly responded to this call and settled in clusters on the

homefront, where they initiated efforts that gave rise to organic growth. The House of Justice has described this as an “astonishing achievement”.¹³

This achievement testifies to the capacity that was built among the friends in many regions of the world. Experience gained by committed believers in their home clusters, where a pattern of growth had previously been established, gave them the confidence to assist communities in other clusters. Moreover, familiarity with the local language and culture, a deep understanding of the social conditions of the new localities in which they were serving, and an ability to connect with their inhabitants through existing social ties and new friendships played a key role in the success of their endeavours. These friends were ably supported by individuals from nearby advanced clusters and by those serving on regional and national institutions and agencies. Auxiliary Board members also played a crucial role in encouraging the friends to pioneer and then assisting them in their efforts to establish a programme of growth at their posts. Some of these homefront pioneers served full time, bringing lessons learned in the community-building process to their service as tutors, teachers, animators, or members of cluster agencies. Often, the pioneers served in a specific area of a village or a street in a neighbourhood, concentrating their efforts where there was heightened receptivity.

In many places, it was owing to the efforts of pioneers that national communities were able to fulfil their goals for establishing programmes of growth during the Five Year Plan. In **Papua New Guinea**, during the initial months of the Plan, some 50 pioneers from across the country were identified, oriented in their service, and dispatched to several regions, a deployment

that helped extend the process of growth from a few dozen clusters to nearly 100. Over the course of the Plan in **India**, more than 100 homefront pioneers contributed to establishing a significant portion of the 362 new programmes of growth in that country.

Institutions at the regional and national levels made use of various means to identify, approach, and prepare potential pioneers. In the **Talamanca** cluster of **Costa Rica**, a native believer and a family responded to a call for pioneers at an institute seminar and moved to a cluster in the region with an indigenous population. In the northern and southern regions of **South Africa**, the institute boards identified potential pioneers, who were then visited in their homes. This strategy allowed conversations to take place that helped the friends advance their understanding of the role of homefront pioneers and deepen their commitment to service. Before settling at their posts, the friends attended an orientation programme that helped them achieve clarity about their individual and collective services and strengthened their understanding of the work at hand, specifically how to assist a local population to establish a sound institute process. Later, members of institutions and agencies at the national and regional levels came together with 24 pioneers from 15 clusters throughout the country to learn from their experience. This gathering helped the institutions refine their orientation programme for future pioneers and identify capabilities among the pioneers that needed strengthening.

An important aspect of the work of the institutions was to offer ongoing support to the homefront pioneers, which included organizing gatherings for them to reflect periodically on their service. In the **Man** cluster in **Côte d’Ivoire**, to help alleviate suspicions about a pioneer being a newcomer

Pioneers Supporting an Unfolding Process of Growth

A process of growth begins to unfold in a cluster when the believers there—or at times a single homefront pioneer—“enter into meaningful and distinctive conversation with local residents”¹⁴ and find opportunities to initiate one or more of the core activities. Translating these initial stirrings of interest into a programme for the sustained expansion and consolidation of the Faith follows no predetermined route. As the examples below illustrate, a variety of methods were used to start a process through which residents in a cluster, “prompted by a wish to contribute to the spiritual and material well-being of their communities, [were] enabled to begin offering acts of service”¹⁵.

In the **Highlands** cluster in **Kenya**, a homefront pioneer collaborated with three local Bahá'ís to introduce devotional meetings to their neighbours. The local residents greatly enjoyed attending these gatherings and began to ask what more they could do in their community. After receiving a suggestion that they could start children's classes, some of the families identified youth who might wish to assist with this activity. Soon after, visiting tutors came from a neighbouring cluster to facilitate the study of Book 3 of the sequence of courses, and a few children's classes began. These initial activities attracted local

inhabitants, particularly youth and junior youth, who joined the community-building efforts in their area. Before long, a vibrant community life flourished as young people joined hands with adults and dedicated their energies to hosting devotional gatherings in their homes and encouraging the participation of children and junior youth in the educational programmes of the community.

In the **Aragatsotn** cluster in **Armenia**, after a pioneering couple invited their neighbours to participate in core activities, a programme of growth emerged in only four months. Three of these neighbours formally embraced the Faith after study of the first book in the sequence of courses. One of them shared the Bahá'í Teachings with some

30 people in her own circle of acquaintances, and together with her mother planned to reach out to their extended family members residing in nearby localities. The pioneers, together with the new Bahá'í families, continued to widen their circle of friendship. They visited their neighbours on every Bahá'í Holy Day to share the Message of Bahá'u'lláh and invite those who expressed interest to participate in devotional gatherings and the study of institute courses.

In the **Valle del Cauca** Department in **Colombia**, several clusters passed the first milestone through the efforts of homefront pioneers using approaches that had proved successful in other places. They exchanged greetings with their neighbours each day,



Participants of a pioneer orientation in Nuuk, Greenland.

which led to meaningful conversations and new friendships. Their participation in sporting or cultural events, such as football matches organized by youth, also provided opportunities for them to integrate into the life of the local community. Having established ties of friendship, they held several meetings for local residents to converse on topics such as the current conditions of society and how they could contribute to its betterment, the role of youth, and the aims of the training institute's sequence of courses. These conversations led to initiating study circles and service activities with greater participation of local residents.

The work of homefront pioneers in a cluster was often reinforced in the beginning by those who visited regularly, often to facilitate intensive study of the institute courses. In the **Muhuza** cluster in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, a homefront pioneer, after having several conversations with local friends, found nearly 40 individuals who expressed interest in participating in core activities. As the pioneer struggled to respond to all those who wished to be involved, two friends from a nearby community offered to visit the cluster and serve as tutors. The first of these friends facilitated study circles which raised up 14 children's class teachers. In time, 3 new children's classes were established, with a total of 36 children. The second tutor helped 14 friends study Book 5 and accompanied them as they formed their own junior youth groups—4 groups were established with 21 junior youth. Through the combined support of the pioneer and the visiting tutors, a programme of growth was established in the cluster within a short period.

in the village, the National Spiritual Assembly wrote a letter of introduction to the village chief and other authorities. Soon after, the Auxiliary Board member informed the local population of the purpose of the pioneer's presence. In addition, the Regional Bahá'í Council encouraged a believer who had experience in the institute process to lend continual support to the pioneer and to help train more tutors. This process of accompanying not only strengthened the effectiveness of the pioneer but also enhanced the functioning of the institutions. In the **Cook Islands**, capacity at the national level was increased as institutions and agencies made a concerted effort to work side by side with the pioneers in the country and to regularly reflect with them.

Support from Neighbouring Communities

Much of the support for emerging clusters came from neighbouring areas with intensive programmes of growth. Visitors to these more advanced clusters could learn through first-hand experience how to foster a process of growth; teaching teams or experienced tutors from such clusters would travel to nearby areas to support fledgling activities; and regional reflection gatherings provided an avenue for friends from advanced clusters to share insights on their contributions to the task of establishing new programmes of growth. In this way, advanced clusters became places from which lessons learned through experience flowed widely.

In **India**, clusters where there was experience with an intensive programme of growth served as reservoirs of resources that helped to extend the growth process to neighbouring communities, an approach that contributed to the establishment of hundreds of new programmes of growth by Ridván 2016. As a result of such support,



Youth gather with a group of children in Australia.

activities steadily increased in villages and neighbourhoods, and in several clusters these smaller geographic units became host to more than 100 activities. This concentration of activities heightened among local inhabitants their sense of ownership over the process of community building. In the **Surgana** cluster, the growth process accelerated when a teaching team from a nearby cluster reinforced the efforts of two homefront pioneers through regular visits. Soon, 24 friends, the majority of them young women, formally joined the Faith and advanced rapidly through the sequence of institute courses. The believers in an increasing number of clusters throughout the country helped to raise the capacity of friends in neighbouring clusters to expand activities by involving more and more people in the institute process and accompanying them in their service, and structures to nurture and sustain these activities began to emerge. Regional institutions increased their ability to collaborate with others and to systematize reflection gatherings at both the cluster and regional levels. To support the cluster agencies, coordination schemes were established at the subregional level. At the same time, inter-regional reflection gatherings were held for members of institutions and institute coordinators to share insights and learn from one another's experience.



A junior youth group studies Breezes of Confirmation in Cluj, Romania.

Mobilizing Youth on a Path of Service

In many cases, young people were in the front ranks of those helping to stimulate activity in emerging clusters by meeting local people and inviting them to participate in community-building activities, often lending assistance through teaching campaigns or extended stays in the cluster. In **Liberia**, members of a team visiting the **Ganta** cluster identified local youth interested in serving as junior youth animators and invited them to their own cluster for training. The activities the youth started upon their return to Ganta helped that cluster advance past the first milestone and, in turn, become a reservoir from which others arose to support a neighbouring community.

As large numbers of youth around the world offered their services as pioneers, the institutions and communities began to learn how best to support and empower them at their posts. After two youth were deployed to the **Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico**, the Regional Bahá'í Council, in consultation



A children's class in Madagascar.

with an Auxiliary Board member, developed a plan for them to receive support from cluster agencies. In addition, the Regional Council identified older believers in each community who could befriend the youth and serve alongside them. The aim of the Regional Council was to provide for the ongoing training of these young souls and to ensure that they felt encouraged and focused in their daily service. In the **Northwestern** region of the **United States**, 77 individuals, of whom 39 were youth, arose as homefront pioneers to meet the goals of the region. After consultation with institutions and agencies and an orientation programme, these friends moved to selected neighbourhoods in goal clusters throughout the region.

In some regions, institutions organized opportunities for young people to offer short-term service over the course of extended holiday periods. During their long summer break, a group of 19 youth from **Sydney, Australia**, embarked on a two-and-a-half-month period of service. As part of their orientation before moving to four goal clusters, they dedicated two weeks to an intensive institute campaign and to teaching trips to neighbourhoods in Sydney. "It is only day 12 of my two-and-a-half-month journey," one youth commented in the closing days of the orientation, "but I have already learned



A junior youth group in Khujand, Tajikistan.

so much about what it means to live a life of service, using my capacity to help empower others to change their communities and cultivate a united world."

Working with Resident Believers

Many programmes of growth emerged when the resident believers in a cluster took opportunities to converse with local inhabitants and invite them to take part in a process of individual and collective transformation. At the beginning of the Five Year Plan, there was one Bahá'í family in the **Ra** cluster in the **Fiji Islands**. Within a short period, a programme of growth was established with the help of a visiting team that met with the resident family to study guidance from the Universal House of Justice and consult about engaging youth from the wider community in conversations on spiritual themes. On subsequent trips, the team reflected with the family on the nature of the interactions they had had and deepened together on the principles involved. The team also regularly visited the newly contacted youth and formed bonds of friendship with them. Through this process, these youth participated in an intensive study of Books 1, 3, and 5. After these developments, a homefront pioneer was deployed to the cluster for three months to help consolidate the efforts of the young people and begin other activities. These initial efforts—forming a nucleus of friends

Building Capacity within a Local Population

Some of the most inspiring stories of the Five Year Plan are the personal accounts of homefront pioneers. The following accounts exemplify the joy that comes, after study and practice, from translating the guidance of the Universal House of Justice into reality, and in witnessing a local population gradually build capacity to serve its own community.



Participants of a junior youth group in Ukraine.

“When I first arrived as a pioneer in **Jamaica**, I had the sincere but inaccurate conception that all that was needed to establish a programme of growth in a cluster was to have four or five of each core activity functioning. Within a number of months, I was animating three junior youth groups, teaching four children’s classes, hosting a devotional gathering, and serving as a tutor for a few Book 1 study circles. Although this was a valuable learning experience and enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of each core activity, in time I dropped the majority of these activities as I realized I could not sustain them and, in fact, they drew time and energy away from the process of capacity building within the local population. Any enthusiastic homefront or international pioneer settling in a new cluster may be impelled to adopt a similar initial approach. However, my experience and that of

other pioneers has helped me to better understand that a more effective approach would be to keep the sustainability of activities in mind when aiming to establish a programme of growth.”

The experience of a homefront pioneer in **Odessa, Ukraine**, demonstrates how one person with a vision of building capacity within a local population can, unaided and in a short period, enable others to arise and serve.

“A few weeks after moving to Odessa, I met a young woman at a conference. We started talking, and I immediately felt we would become friends. During our conversation, I told her that I had come to Odessa as a Bahá’í pioneer. I briefly told her about the purpose of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh and described the institute process and the devotional meetings held by the community on a weekly basis. She was very

interested, and a few days later she came to a devotional gathering. To my great joy, she felt comfortable and right away started reading Bahá’í prayers. The next step in our friendship was to study Book 1 together, which took us only a few weeks to finish. Soon after, she formally joined the Faith. A few months later, I asked whether she would like to start a devotional gathering in her neighbourhood, which she happily did, inviting some friends and acquaintances to her home. Later, she studied Book 7, as she desired to become a tutor and take her friends through the sequence. It’s a great pleasure to observe her rapid development and her increasing spiritual understanding of life. I hope that soon she will feel so strong that she will be helping others to acquire a spiritual vision and find their path of service.”



Junior youth in the Dominican Republic study and memorize quotes about service before discussing a service project.

and training youth to support the process of community building—ignited growth across the cluster.

In **Navarre**, in the north of **Spain**, change began when a group of friends gathered to study Book 6 with a desire and vision to begin a programme of growth in their cluster. This core group of friends studied the guidance of the House of Justice and devised a plan. With a renewed spirit, they engaged the local population in conversations about the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme, which led to the formation of a junior youth group with 12 participants. Their conversations continued and their bonds grew stronger, so that in time the number of new core activities rose and more friends committed themselves to the community-building process.

After becoming Bahá’ís in a large urban cluster, a couple in **Brazil** returned to their home cluster of **Mogi das Cruzes**

with a strong desire to serve. The couple intensively studied Book 5 in the sequence of courses with the help of a visiting tutor and reflected on how they could initiate a process of growth. They spoke about the Faith with people they met, and after they finished studying Book 5, they looked for youngster to participate in the junior youth programme and for youth who would be interested in being trained to serve as animators. They started study circles with these new acquaintances, persevered through every challenge, and saw every chance to accompany new contacts in their study of the institute courses as an opportunity to gain fresh insights and refine their approach. Through their efforts and the support of the visiting friend, a growing nucleus of friends continued to advance the process of growth, establishing core activities and hosting firesides that became regular teaching opportunities.

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Friends teach the Faith at a neighbourhood gathering in Chile.

Increasing Intensity

Even before the Five Year Plan was launched in 2011, the Bahá'í world had gained valuable experience in intensifying activities in those clusters where a programme of growth had been established. The last five years saw a further accumulation of experience and an efflorescence of the many capacities required for the effective implementation of an intensive programme of growth: carrying out meaningful conversations with an ever wider circle of acquaintances and inhabitants in a locality; expanding significantly the pool of human resources through robust institute activities; making effective use of gatherings for reflection; and enhancing the functioning of institutions and agencies serving at the cluster level. Often, the movement

of a cluster from the first to the second milestone was greatly facilitated when the friends developed their capacity to converse with young people, invite them to participate in institute courses, and assist them to initiate core activities, particularly in the villages and neighbourhoods where they lived.

In striving to increase intensity, the challenge in some clusters with fledgling programmes of growth was simply to sustain and extend the healthy pattern of action already established. Elsewhere, the task was to revitalize intensive programmes of growth in clusters where the level of activity and the development of human resources seemed to have reached a plateau. In such communities the friends strove

to create “that spiritually charged arena in which powers are multiplied in unified action”.¹⁶ The account below provides a striking example of how activity was intensified in one such community.

The **Makeni** cluster in **Sierra Leone** had a relatively small Bahá'í community and a few sustained activities when two pioneers—one of whom had substantial experience with the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme—arrived in 2011 as part of a special pioneering initiative. The pioneers began activities and met regularly with a small group of friends to consult as a team about the development of the cluster. One of their first steps was to help two Bahá'í youth establish a children's class and a junior youth group. Additionally, a number of youth from the wider society were invited to attend an intensive study of Book 5 in **Freetown**, the capital city. Vital to the subsequent progress of the cluster was assisting this group of young people to develop a collective vision for the advancement of their community. During their study, they made plans to extend the process to a widening circle of their acquaintances, to support one another in their efforts, and to continue advancing in their study of institute courses. After returning to Makeni, they were able to establish new junior youth groups, involving about 20 youngsters. Many were attracted to the new groups, and some of the junior youth began organizing children's activities. To nurture the spiritual development of the growing number of youth who had become engaged in community building, the team of friends supporting activities in the cluster encouraged and supported a few Bahá'í families to host regular devotional gatherings.

As the number of junior youth groups grew, coordinators emerged from among the animators, and the cluster became associated with the learning site for the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme in **Accra-Tema, Ghana**. The service projects of the junior youth groups and the efforts of the animators to mobilize their friends generated further interest in the programme, and dozens of additional youth arose to play a part. In parallel, the number of children's classes grew to around 20, and a coordinator was appointed to accompany the teachers. The growth in the number of groups and classes increased participation at Nineteen Day Feasts and Holy Days, which in turn encouraged the Local Spiritual Assembly to meet more regularly and consult about how to enhance the quality of these gatherings and serve the needs of those participating in community activities.

The youth conference in Ghana in 2013 lent significant impetus to the process of human resource development in Makeni. A key objective after the conference was to increase the number of tutors in the cluster. After some of the animators completed their study of Book 7, more and more young people were able to study the main sequence of



A children's class in Sierra Leone.

courses. A study circle coordinator was eventually appointed to accompany the tutors who were learning to facilitate Book 1 study circles with their friends. A national youth gathering also contributed to involving more youth in the community-building activities. By 2014, the number of devotional meetings had grown to 38 with 279 participants, and an Area Teaching Committee had been appointed. At that time, there were 46 classes with 550 children and 92 junior youth groups with over 1,000 participants. The initial team of friends in Makeni had now evolved into a fully fledged scheme of coordination. Its members benefited from the support and encouragement of the institutions and from participation in national reflection gatherings. Within a period of just over four years, the cluster moved from having 8 core activities with 53 participants—none of whom were junior youth—to about 200 core activities in which over 2,000 individuals participated, with a corresponding increase in the number of human resources.

Meaningful Conversations

As the friends at the forefront of activities learned to engage others in conversation about the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and invite them to contribute to the processes of change under way, the receptivity of certain populations, especially in neighbourhoods or villages, became evident. Not surprisingly, young people proved to be the most receptive.

The friends in **Singapore** strengthened their intensive programme of growth by focusing on a few neighbourhoods. One teaching team in the Bishan neighbourhood began by meeting to pray for the

inhabitants of their community and to study passages describing the inherent nobility of man, the oneness of humanity, and the purpose of the community-building activities of the Faith. As a result of conversations with their neighbours, two children's classes were formed. Three sets of parents began studying the sequence of institute courses, and a devotional gathering was established. As the friends continued to reach out to more and more people in the neighbourhood, the number participating in activities rose to 40, and two new families formally embraced the Faith.

In the **Pune** cluster in **India**, the friends focused their efforts in four neighbourhoods. A group of five friends was assigned to each neighbourhood. They conversed with the inhabitants about the importance of spiritual education for children and junior youth and held a series of institute campaigns, which led to a sizeable increase in core activities in these neighbourhoods.

In the **Jamundí** cluster in **Colombia**, where the community was striving to intensify its activities, the friends considered how they could expand the number of people



Local Bahá'ís engage in meaningful conversations with their friends and neighbours in Pune, India.



with whom they were conversing on spiritual matters. In collaboration with the coordinator for children's classes, the Local Spiritual Assembly decided to focus on supporting the efforts of young people to serve the community by forming a team of three friends to organize intensive institute campaigns for youth. The team discussed the purpose and vision of the institute process with young people and invited them to study the courses. The first intensive session involved 12 youth who then invited their friends. In the second intensive session, 16 youth attended. An increasing number of people in the community joined the effort by serving as tutors or by providing hospitality and transportation. The friends in the cluster found, in this simple initiative, an essential strategy that was appropriate for the characteristics of the participants. Since youth were attracted to monthly institute campaigns, a new dynamic and rhythm in the institute process took root and contributed to advancing the process of growth in the cluster.

In one neighbourhood in **Vancouver, Canada**, a local Bahá'í began a conversation with a mother about the spiritual education of her child and the possibility of starting a children's class in the area. Through her friendship with this mother, the Bahá'í met several more

families with children and began having regular gatherings at her home. The first time the families visited, the discussion explored the concept of true friendship and the material and spiritual needs of their community. Over time, the gathering became a regular devotional meeting, and a children's class was also held. Later, a study circle was started with the mother and her friends, and the participants began to take more ownership of the activities in the neighbourhood. They made plans to expand the activities, organize a community gathering, and increase participation in the children's class.



A neighbourhood children's class in Vancouver, Canada.

Raising Up Tutors

In the initial stages of developing a programme of growth, communities relied largely on support from more advanced clusters in raising up human resources. In time, a few friends gained sufficient experience and confidence to be able to serve as tutors of the first few courses in the sequence. This marked a new stage in the development of a cluster, and made it possible for more people to study institute courses. Indeed, having a cadre of local tutors was critical to increasing the intensity and dynamism of the community-building process.

At one point during the Plan, the institutions in **Haiti** realized that many of the 10 clusters with programmes of growth in the country—including newly formed ones—had been struggling to advance the community-building process. Those involved in the training institute reflected on how to raise up and accompany tutors and made plans accordingly. Teams of experienced tutors were formed to support the friends in these clusters. They were also encouraged to collaborate with the Auxiliary Board members and the coordinators. By organizing institute campaigns, institute seminars for tutors, and tutor reflection meetings, the teams helped local friends to move through the sequence of courses and to initiate and facilitate new study circles. The number of study circles rose markedly, which resulted in an increase in human resources committed to the community-building process.

Similarly, in **Malawi**, the training institute organized a number of institute campaigns across the country to raise up additional tutors. As the participants advanced from book to book, they developed a sound understanding of the institute process and



An orientation for tutors in South Queensland, Australia.

were able to help many young people study the institute courses and begin to serve.

In the **Dili** cluster of **East Timor**, a group of participants studying Book 7 were prepared to begin serving as tutors. After completing this course, the group discussed how they would help others study the institute courses and enhance their capacity for service. They invited 35 youth who were family members and friends of the participants of existing study circles to an event where they shared what they had learned in the institute process and encouraged them to also begin studying the courses. Seven study circles of Ruhi Book 1 were promptly formed by these newly trained tutors, and within a week the number of study circles doubled to 14, with 170 participants. This remarkable progress, taking place in a short period of time, helped raise the tutors' enthusiasm for the institute process in the cluster.

Educating Children and Empowering Junior Youth

In settings both urban and rural, the friends continued to meet the challenge of promoting programmes for the spiritual education of children and the spiritual empowerment of junior youth. Factors that contributed to progress in these two areas included: an increased capacity to converse with young people from the wider society and invite them to serve as teachers and animators; helping them progress through the courses of the training institute; assisting them as they formed classes and groups; holding gatherings for reflection; and striving to ensure that, whenever possible, children's class materials for multiple grades and the whole range of the texts of the junior youth programme were available in the appropriate languages. The account below shares the experience of one cluster.

At the beginning of the Plan, two friends from the **Gran Canaria** cluster in the **Canary Islands** attended a seminar at the learning site for the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme in **Madrid**,

Spain. At the time, Gran Canaria had four junior youth groups, and the community had gained some experience with a few elements of the programme. The seminar helped the two friends to visualize the potential in Gran Canaria for expanding the programme and to set goals and make plans to achieve them. A list was made of Bahá'ís who may be interested in serving as animators, and each was visited to discuss the programme and study relevant guidance from the Universal House of Justice. The friends making the visits also shared stories about the transformation of junior youth in the cluster who had previously participated in the programme, and this helped to provide the potential animators with a clear vision and sense of purpose. Seven individuals joined a study of Book 5 and, with the help of the junior youth participating in the existing groups and their animators, 6 new groups were formed, bringing the total number to 10. A few months later, a cohort of youth took part in an intensive study of Book 5. The friends developed a pattern of regularly offering the study of



Youth practise public speaking in Burkina Faso.

Special Pioneering Initiatives to Intensify Growth

At the beginning of this Plan, the Universal House of Justice announced that it would “regularly call the attention of selected National Assemblies in different parts of the world to specific urgent pioneer needs”.¹⁷ To advance the process of expansion and consolidation by raising human resources dedicated to community-building endeavours in certain countries or international regions, assistance from outside would be needed for a period to realize the potential for greater growth and development. The primary objective of such initiatives was to foster intensive programmes of growth in each country or territory involved and build the capacity of individuals and institutions to assume responsibility to sustain and extend the work. The initiatives entailed placing in specified clusters pioneers who possessed sound experience of the Plan,

particularly in working with youth and involving them in the institute process and the junior youth programme. In this regard, neighbouring countries and other designated countries were asked to help by providing pioneers from their own national communities.

Drawing on the experience and insights gained from the **Caribbean** initiative, which concluded in 2012, thirteen special initiatives were established around the world in the last five years: five in Africa (**Angola; Burundi; Liberia and Sierra Leone; Mozambique; and Tunisia**); one in the Americas (**Santiago** cluster, **Chile**); four in Asia (**Georgia; Korea; Laos and Thailand; and the Russian Federation**); one in Australasia (the **Pacific**); and two in Europe (the **Balkans** and the **Baltics**). Collectively, these special initiatives involved 40 countries, 83 clusters, and

several hundred pioneers.

Through the dedicated efforts of pioneers and collaborating institutions and agencies, new programmes of growth were established, those already in existence were strengthened, and institutional capacity was enhanced. In **Liberia** and **Mozambique**, advances in the movement of clusters and institutional capacity led to the re-establishment of the National Spiritual Assembly in both countries. By the end of the Plan, the community in Liberia was sustaining well over 200 core activities with about 2,100 participants, and in Mozambique the number of core activities had surpassed 60 with a total of over 600 participants. In eastern **Angola**, there were nearly 150 core activities with more than 1,200 participants by *Riḍván* 2015, progress that led to the formation of the first Regional Bahá’í Council in that country. In the **Balkans**, an Administrative Committee was formed in **Kosovo**.

The main focus of the pioneers was to strengthen the institute process, giving particular attention to the junior youth programme. Within two and a half years, the junior youth programme in **Burundi** advanced from 11 groups with 102 participants to 48 groups with 745 participants. In the **Manica** cluster in **Mozambique**, the programme became well-established in one of the



A junior youth group in the Peñalolén neighbourhood of Santiago, Chile.

neighbourhoods where 9 groups with 85 participants were sustained. Two pioneers settled in the **Ulan-Ude** cluster in the **Russian Federation** and, as they learned the Russian language and established relationships with local believers, they became progressively more effective in their efforts to attract youth. As a result, they assisted a group of youth to progress through the institute courses and supported two junior youth groups that were formed in different neighbourhoods. Collective teaching projects also began to feature regularly as part of the three-month cycles of activity.

In countries that had a special initiative under way, gatherings were regularly convened for pioneers and others involved in the initiative to study guidance, reflect on learning, and plan the next steps. The friends in **Laos** and **Thailand** noted that the reflection meetings for all pioneers serving in these countries helped them to advance, sustain enthusiasm, and develop a collective spirit.

The unfoldment of the institute process in these regions also fostered change at the level of culture. For example, in the **Balkan** region, which in the past had experienced the

horrors of a war that divided the countries and the people, a discourse around peace emerged. The special initiative there contributed to laying a new path of progress and to the elimination of long-standing prejudices among young people. At the youth conference for countries in the Balkans held in **Tirana, Albania**, in 2013, the majority of participants were from the wider society. At the beginning of the conference, the Bosniaks, Serbs, and Kosovars were unaccustomed to spending time with one another. “I had never talked with a Serb”, a Bosniak youth said. However, the more they engaged with the conference materials, the more their fellowship was cultivated. On the last day, these youth went on stage holding hands and said, “For us in the region, this is a new beginning, a new chapter of history that we want to contribute to writing.”



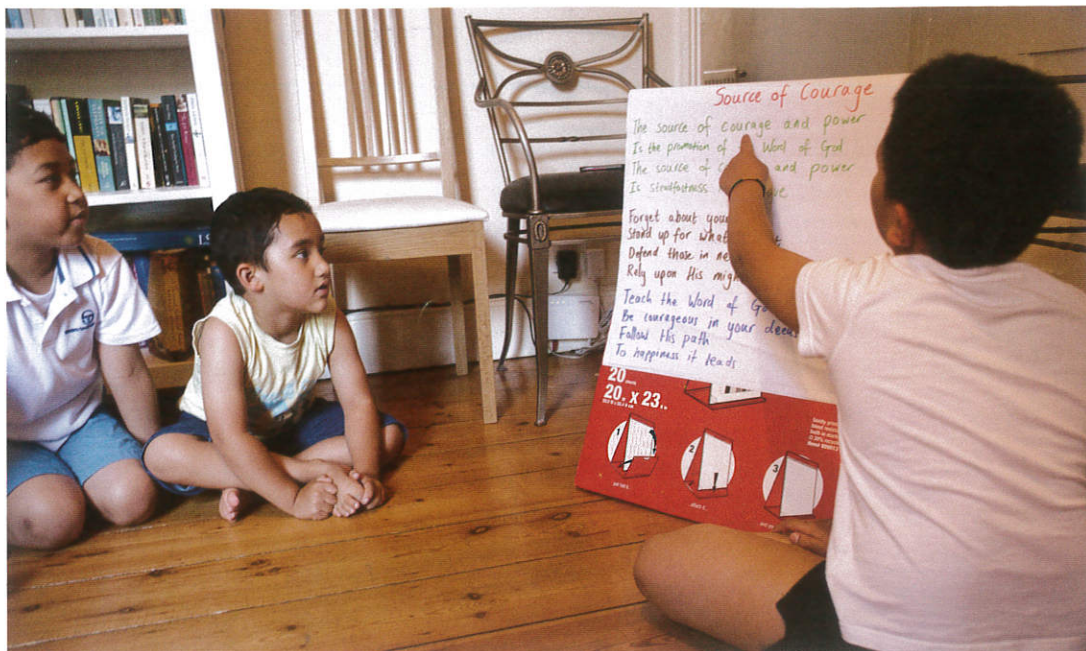
A children's class in Rrashbull, Albania.



Dawn prayers on a beach during an intensive institute campaign in the Caroline Islands.



A pioneer from the Philippines uses the arts to connect with the community in the Russian Federation.



A children's class in a neighbourhood in the United Kingdom.

Book 5, mostly during school holidays. This strengthened the overall process of human resource development in the cluster, which was later given additional impetus by the 2013 youth conference in Madrid.

Soon after the initial surge in the number of groups, junior youth began attending cluster reflection gatherings and sharing with the community the songs they had composed. Witnessing the enthusiasm and capacity of this age group awakened the entire community to the potentialities inherent in junior youth and the value of the programme; many friends were compelled to intensify their teaching efforts to reach larger numbers of youth and junior youth. As more friends participated in the teaching work throughout the cluster, it became inevitable that, whenever a junior youth group was formed, a children's class would also be established in the same area. The two activities came to mutually reinforce each other. For example, by

observing their older peers, the children developed a stronger desire to offer service and became aware of the next step in their spiritual education. In general, lessons learned in the junior youth programme were successfully applied to other lines of action. The devotional character of the cluster was strengthened as the groups initiated devotional meetings for their families and developed the habit of praying together. In neighbourhoods where there was a concentration of junior youth groups, the heightened level of activity opened the doors for collaboration with like-minded organizations in the wider society, including schools, which began to seek the practical help and advice of the Bahá'ís in their efforts to contribute to the well-being of their localities.



Fostering a Spirit of Teaching

Sharing the Word of God and teaching the Faith were part of every effort to reach out to receptive souls and populations. The focus of teaching was, naturally, suited to the capacity and interests of the listeners. At times these conversations centred on ways of contributing to the betterment of society, while on other occasions the friends offered a direct explanation of the fundamental verities of the Faith, which sometimes led to the enrolment of individuals in the Cause of God. The two accounts below provide examples of how institutions and agencies have collaborated in helping individuals to share the Message of Bahá'u'lláh with a growing number of people.

At the start of the Plan, the Local Spiritual Assembly of Kolofo'ou in the **Tongatapu** cluster in **Tonga** studied the 28 December 2010 message from the Universal House of Justice. This study enabled it to assess the community and identify areas that required strengthening. It had become clear that the number of core activities had stopped growing, so the Assembly recognized a need to revitalize the teaching work. Together with the Area Teaching

Committee, it organized a neighbourhood teaching campaign over a period of three days. During this collective effort, as teams of individuals sought to engage contacts in conversation, often teaching the Faith directly, they experienced a profound sense of joy. By the end of the cycle of activity, 10 new core activities had been established in the neighbourhood, and many new relationships had been formed, some of which were reinforced through regular home visits during the consolidation period. The experiences from the campaign were shared with the whole community to convey the enthusiasm and energy generated and to ignite the flame of love for teaching in others. In reflecting on the campaign and its fruits in the weeks that followed, the friends recognized that the close collaboration of the teaching teams—working together to support one another and to collectively achieve the goals—contributed to their success.

In the **Falcão Real** cluster in **Brazil**, a well-planned, 10-day teaching campaign held during an expansion phase greatly influenced the dynamics of growth in the cluster's initial stage of development. Secretaries of Area Teaching Committees

from other clusters in the region came to participate and gain experience, which they then shared in their own clusters. During the campaign, more than 50 friends embraced the Faith, eliciting new levels of energy in the community and propelling the number of core activities past 100.

Gatherings for Reflection

Consultation and reflection on action remained an integral part of the growth process as a programme of growth advanced. With the introduction of cycles of activity—and its phases of expansion, consolidation, and reflection—the meeting at the end of a cycle often constituted the first formal opportunity for reflection among the active participants in the Plan. Such meetings afforded an opportunity for the friends to study the guidance of the House of Justice, learn from one another's experience, assess the progress of their cluster, and determine the next steps to be taken. As the pattern of activity expanded in a cluster, gatherings for reflection and

learning also emerged for teachers of children's classes, animators, and tutors.

In **Hong Kong**, reflection gatherings for tutors provided a place for them to study and deepen on the messages of the House of Justice and to consult on how, in the context of a bustling urban centre, they could improve the quality of their study circles. The visit of an Auxiliary Board member from a neighbouring country proved to be a great source of encouragement. The Board member shared practical insights from lessons learned in a community that faced a reality similar to that of Hong Kong. At follow-up gatherings, tutors were encouraged to invite their friends and family to participate in study circles. After these meetings, a heightened sense of courage, unity of thought, and mutual support began to emerge in the community, which resulted in increased efforts to teach the Faith directly and to initiate more study circles.



Youth and adults consult and plan together at a reflection meeting in Belarus.



A cluster reflection meeting in the Canary Islands.

Emergence and Strengthening of a Scheme of Coordination

With advances in the process of growth, the small nucleus of friends initially engaged in active service to the community grew in size. Some of these friends with more experience in the educational activities helped others new to the process to take their first steps in an arena of service. Over time, as more people began to serve as children's class teachers, animators, and tutors, such an informal arrangement proved inadequate. In response to this growth, a few friends were called on to serve as coordinators of the educational programmes and were able to offer time and energy to accompany others.

As the consultative process among the coordinators strengthened, the pattern of action, reflection, and consultation seamlessly spread to more pockets of the cluster. The formation of an Area Teaching Committee at this stage helped to facilitate the organization of cluster-wide reflection meetings, foster the devotional character of the community, encourage collective teaching activities, and mobilize individuals and teams to disseminate the pattern of activity to other parts of the cluster.

