

“By instilling in the junior youth a keen sense of purpose, the programme has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to transform young people, increase their commitment to spiritual and material education, empower them to undertake social action for the improvement of their communities, resist the destructive and prejudicial forces within their societies, and contribute to the construction of a better world.”

~International Teaching Center, *Insights from the Frontiers of Learning*, p.4.

In this circular:

Report on the animator gathering • Junior youth around the cluster • Animator reflection study materials: Strengthening the Service Component of Junior Youth Groups • Feast letter from NSA about the Junior Youth Program

Important Upcoming Dates:
(please mark your calendars)

Sun., March 2 (12-7pm):
Text training for animating Breezes of Confirmation and Glimmerings of Hope (followed by breaking Fast together)

Fri., March 28 (7-10pm):
Animator Reflection Gathering

Fri., April 18 – Sun., April 20:
DC Junior Youth Camp

ANIMATORS STUDY AND CONSULT ON SERVICE

On Saturday, February 8, an animator reflection gathering was held at the Baha'i Center. Eight animators and the regional training institute coordinator attended. The animators represented junior youth groups from Cathedral Heights, Columbia Heights, Edgewood and Shaw.

Some animator reflections

After some spirit-filled prayers and songs, the animators briefly shared with each other their reflections on how things are going in their groups. One common theme in these

reflections was a desire by the animators to elevate the spiritual atmosphere of their groups. Animators mentioned the role of prayer, singing and memorization as a means for raising spiritual feelings. Some animators are noticing that the junior youth enjoy these spiritual activities as they become increasingly exposed to them. Further, spiritual conversations with junior youth about God, prayer and the nature of the human being are possible ways to heighten spiritual consciousness. Another area of focus and interest for several groups is in establishing firmer relationships with the families of junior youth through home visits, invitations to devotionals or special junior youth celebrations.

Strengthening the service component of the program

The main focus of the evening was on strengthening the service component of the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program. In thinking about service, the discussions could not be separated from thinking about the nature and purpose of the



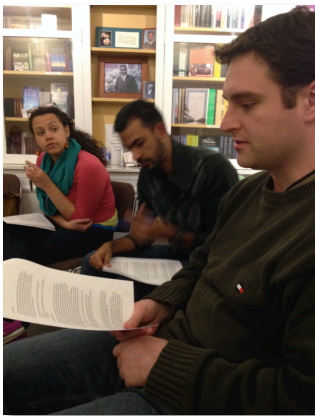
Lew from Shaw neighborhood shares some reflections from his experience as an animator.

program and the overall aim of the Baha'i community to advance civilization. Animators discussed the importance of deepening our understanding of the aim of the program and its relationship to building civilization as a way to endow our (junior youth and animators') actions with greater meaning.

A way that our activities directly connect with building a materially and spiritually prosperous civilization is through service. But building such a civilization requires those participating in its construction to acquire the capabilities that will assist them in becoming more effective builders. The question then before us was: How does the junior youth program help junior youth to acquire capabilities for a life of meaningful service to others?

One way that capabilities for a life of meaningful is developed is through the strengthening of power of expression so that junior youth are better able to describe and analyze their reality; to better identify forces of integration and disintegration in their environment. Closely connected to this is the strengthening of the power of spiritual perception.

The animators also reflected on service as being more than nice actions and disconnected events and began to think about the spiritual attitudes and qualities at the foundation of service and its purpose. For example, selflessness, kindness, unity, humility, desire for justice and love for humanity are a few spiritual attitudes and qualities at the heart of both the approach to, and the goal of, service. Thus, the concept of a spirit of service and how the program fosters it in junior youth – as individuals and as a collective – was discussed.



Basir from Cathedral Heights raises a question about what is "spiritual wellbeing" in the context of thinking about service as a means to achieve a materially and spiritually prosperous world.

These thoughts were reinforced by a study and consultation on guiding principles of social action, extracted from the Office of Social and Economic Development's "Social Action" document (included below). Conversations were rich and thus we only had enough time to look at two of the principles: *Coherence between the spiritual and the material* and *Participation*. Animators reflected on the question: How have service projects in our cluster reflected coherence between the material and spiritual dimensions of existence? This eye-opening question challenged us to think not only about how service projects undertaken by the junior youth contribute to the material and spiritual development of others, but also how it builds capacity in the junior youth themselves. Thus, we would hope that service projects develop material and spiritual capacities (e.g. of consultation, mutual support, planning, selflessness, etc.) within junior youth as they carry out service for others.

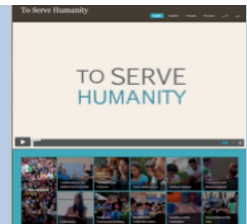
On the principle of participation, animators thought about how service activities might draw on the diverse talents and abilities of the junior youth, and how they might increasingly incorporate the participation of the larger community. This is an area in which we will need to generate experiences and learn together as we carry out service projects with the junior youth.

The study and consultation portion of the gathering concluded with the reading and discussion of two stories of junior youth service projects in other clusters (in Guyana and the United States) and how some of the principles of social action might be expressed in them. These stories also stimulated our ideas about what might be possible as we strive to strengthen the service component of the program. We think that reading these stories would be of interest to all animators (see stories on pg. 8 and 9).

Next steps

The animators decided that a concrete outcome of the gathering would be to *create plan in their animator teams of how and when they will lead a consultation with their groups* to develop a vision of service, and generate ideas for service projects which they would then begin to plan. The goal for each group is to *carry out one service project* (however simple) before the next animator reflection gathering on March 28th when we will come back to reflect on this action and revisit the document we studied (included below). The junior youth coordinating team will follow up with animators to see how efforts at these next steps can be supported.

The Baha'i World Center has released "TO SERVE HUMANITY"



– a series of short videos from the youth conferences. Watch them by clicking [here](#), on the picture, or going to:

<http://news.bahai.org/story/980>

How might these videos be used to inspire and raise the consciousness of others (parents, junior youth and youth) about contributing to building a better world?

JUNIOR YOUTH AROUND THE CLUSTER



Junior youth in Columbia Heights planned a gathering attended by children and parents to celebrate their completion of Glimmerings of Hope and share what they had learned.



Junior youth, youth and adults in Edgewood gather for some spiritual food at their weekly devotional.

* Please send pictures and stories of your JY group and activities to Nicole Rouhani.