

Building capacities for learning in the Atlantic Region

In the next five years, 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.

- Universal House of Justice, letter dated May 23, 2011 to the Bahá'ís of the World

Service of homefront pioneers to help achieve the goals of the Five Year Plan

The Atlantic Region is blessed with the opportunity to learn how to establish 112 programs of growth by the end of the Plan. Many friends are striving to assist these goal clusters—some who serve as mobile tutors and some who made the decision, out of their love for Bahá'u'lláh, to “forsake their homes” to homefront pioneer. The following stories are accounts of two homefront pioneer families’ and one individual’s service in their new clusters.

Lynchburg, Virginia cluster

The Ahmadzadegan family moved in February 2014 from the Fairfax County, Virginia cluster to the Lynchburg, Virginia cluster to serve as homefront pioneers. The family was inspired to pioneer after reflecting on the May 23, 2011 message from the Universal House of Justice in which the Supreme Body noted “*the process of growth which begins to unfold in a cluster, frequently as the result of a single homefront pioneer entering into meaningful conversation with local residents.*” The dedicated service of Mr. Ahmadzadegan’s brother as a pioneer was another motivating factor for the family. All the members of the family feel a deep desire to serve because of the sacrifices of the Bahá'ís in Irán and the Yarán, and they strive to honor them by their service in their new cluster. The move to their new home was made after the family consulted together on several occasions. Every

member was in complete agreement that this was a step they wanted to take. The three children, one in middle school and two in high school, left their friends behind but eagerly looked forward to making new friends in the Lynchburg area.



Ahmadzadegan family in Lynchburg, Virginia

The family prepared by consulting with their Auxiliary Board member who shared information on homefront pioneering and current needs for the Lynchburg cluster. They also attended a homefront pioneering training session. The Auxiliary Board member has continued to visit with them regularly, even after their move, to study the Five Year Plan together and reflect on next steps which the family finds very helpful. Soon after the family settled into their new home, the two sons connected with neighboring families when they played outside with other children. Naturally, they invited

Service of homefront pioneers to help achieve the goals of the Five Year Plan

these new friends to game nights and movie nights hosted by their family. Over time, the families grew closer and have come to know one another.

Over the past eight months, through the friendships they formed and the meaningful conversations they held, the Ahmadzadegan family invited new friends, classmates, co-workers and neighbors to core activities or holy day observances. Currently, the family is supporting a devotional gathering, a children's class, a junior youth group, and a study circle.

The father, Martin, shared that he and his family continue to invite new contacts and friends to devotional meetings, children's classes and holy day gatherings. One of the children, Monady, offers a children's class for non-Bahá'í children. A mobile tutor provides encouragement and support by tutoring Book 2: *Arising to Serve*, studying the guidance together, aiding the animator in preparations for the group, and participating in the outreach portion of an intensive campaign. Monady assisted in starting a junior youth group but it stopped because the junior youth did not continue their participation. However, in a neighboring community a junior youth group began to meet, consisting of a community member's sons and their friends. Currently, a second mobile tutor traveling to the cluster to tutor Book 1: *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* and Book 6: *Teaching the Cause* with the friends. On a bi-weekly basis, they study Teaching Christians Effectively by Dr. David Young to deepen their knowledge of Christianity which they hope will aid them to connect with and teach their Christian contacts and friends. They appreciate all the loving support from the Institutions and from friends within and outside of the Lynchburg cluster.

North Central Coast, North Carolina cluster

In the second week of June 2014, a meeting was called with several young adults in Los Angles by three of the Counsellors serving in North America in which they were asked to consider homefront pioneering. Aimee had no commitments to keep her in Los Angeles and her experience in applying to serve at the Bahá'í World Centre taught her that being obedient to such requests was in her best interest. Also, when she left her service at the World Centre she expressed her dearest wish was to "pioneer someday". A dear friend said that he prayed her wish would come true. In September her wish did come true as she traveled across the country to settle in one of the goal clusters in North Carolina – the North Central Coast cluster.

She was well-prepared to pioneer. She completed the Ruhi Institute sequence of courses and had tutored several of the books. She hosted devotional gatherings, taught children's classes (Grade 2 is her favorite!) and had some experience with animating junior youth groups. In California her children's class participants progressed into using the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program material and she served as their animator going

A new programme of growth begins as two nascent capacities develop. First, one or more friends in a cluster must be able to help individuals study the institute's sequence of courses and accompany them as they initiate core activities. Then, these individuals must be able to attract others to participate in the core activities. As efforts along these lines have borne fruit in various parts of the world, the institutions concerned set aside exaggerated expectations of what must be achieved before a new programme of growth can be said to have emerged.

Insights from the Frontiers of Learning

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We call upon all to reflect upon the significance of the endeavour in which the community of the Greatest Name is engaged, the purpose of which the Master strove to underline so often in the course of His travels, and to rededicate themselves to contribute their share to its outcome." Try with all your hearts", He urged one audience, "to be willing channels for God's Bounty. For I say unto you that He has chosen you to be His messengers of love throughout the world, to be His bearers of spiritual gifts to man, to be the means of spreading unity and concord on the earth."

Universal House of Justice
December 5, 2013 letter to the
Baha'is of the World

forward. She had some experience in having conversations in the neighborhoods and in meeting with different community organizations, primarily charter school administrators.

Aimee continues to prepare herself by studying about Christians who use Biblical scriptures in their lives. She tries to copy into a journal the Scripture they quote, taking care to note the topic they understand it to address and how they are able to apply it practically to their lives. She has tried to look at the quotes thematically and find Bahá'í quotes that address these themes. She has also been reading A Manual for Pioneers by Ruhiyyih Khanum, Portals to Freedom by Howard Colby Ives, and The Heart of the Gospel by George Townshend. Sometimes she also listens to talks by various members of the Institutions.

Aimee understands the need for sustainability. She wants to be organic with her community, which is somewhat difficult in a small town unaccustomed to people moving in or out. Before she moved to her home cluster she stayed with a Bahá'í friend in Jacksonville NC. She visited the local community college, the Boys and Girls Club, and the library. She also made a point to visit different locally owned cafes and restaurants. When she finally moved in, she did what everyone does, that is, she smiled and said hi to her neighbors! She still makes a point to try to walk around the neighborhood or ride her bike - even work in the front yard on nice days - and say hi or wave to all who pass by.

She started hosting some of her neighbors for tea some afternoons. They were kind and gracious. In turn, they invited her to do different things with them. One neighbor joined her when she hosted the celebration of the Day of the Covenant in her home; another neighbor and she discussed *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*. She hopes to begin a study circle when her schedule frees up.

Aimee tries to seize every opportunity to talk about the Faith. She also has been trying to do "as 'Abdu'l-Baha suggests in such situations: live the life, live the life, live the life....". She feels that this is particularly important for her because she has experienced some culture shock as respects the level of racial prejudice. She believes she needs to focus on being in a learning mode and to strive to be humble, reflective and wise. She shares "I have learned that God really is sufficient unto me!"

Service of homefront pioneers to help achieve the goals of the Five Year Plan

Tri-City Area, Tennessee cluster

Immediate inspiration for Fredda and John to become homefront pioneer came from attending the intensive institute campaign held in northern Virginia. It was a three week intensive, held fourteen hours a day and filled with study, joy and work. They studied for the purpose of learning by doing and went into the field of service two weekends. They shared that if only one of them had attended, it would have been impossible for them to share the experience with each other.

"The spiritual atmosphere and the practical aspects of the training were so lovingly and thoughtfully created. It was fun, inspiring, informative and transforming." They studied Ruhi Books 1-4, The Advent of Divine Justice, The Tablets of the Divine Plan, guidance from the letters of the Universal House of Justice and the materials from the Youth Conferences held in 2013.

John and Fredda were the only "older" couple there. All the other attendees were youth. They loved being with the youth and they believed they learned so much from them. Use of the arts during the campaign was very enjoyable and useful for their future service. They appreciated the "baggage-free" open hearts and energy the youth have. They found the opportunity to be with and learn from the youth as invaluable.

Before the campaign they consulted about homefront pioneering for a number of years. Fredda studied all the Ruhi Books through Book 8 Unit 2: *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh—The Guardian of the Faith*, and had tutored Books 1, 2, 7, and 8. She also served as a pioneer overseas in the past.

John also studied Ruhi Books 1 through 7 and is currently studying Book 8 Unit 1: *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh—The Center of the Covenant*. He also took Book 5: *Releasing the Powers of Junior Youth* because he wanted to work with the junior-youth age group. Both have hosted many firesides and devotional gatherings in their home. When their employment situation changed they began thinking again about where they could best serve the Faith outside of the Washington DC area. They shared, "We felt 'primed' to be inspired to move because we had already been thinking about it."

They also made their decision after consulting with the Auxiliary Board members who serve Washington DC, Tennessee and Kentucky, and with the secretary of the Regional Council of the Atlantic States. They wanted to make sure they were doing all they could towards fulfilling the numerical goal from the Universal House of Justice to achieve 5,000 programs of growth by the end of the Five Year Plan in 2016. They studied the guidance, prayed, and wanted to be obedient to the Universal House of Justice. All of these things helped them to be prepared. They continue to attend any reflection spaces or trainings organized by the Institute when it is possible.

They arrived at their homefront pioneer post in Johnson City, Tennessee on May 7, 2014.



Fredda and John are standing second and third from the right. They are shown here with friends from Tennessee, Kentucky, and Maryland.

Service of homefront pioneers to help achieve the goals of the Five Year Plan

Putting on the armour of His love, firmly buckling on the shield of His mighty Covenant, mounted on the steed of steadfastness, holding aloft the lance of the Word of the Lord of Hosts, and with unquestioning reliance on His promises as the best provision for their journey, let them set their faces towards those fields that still remain unexplored and direct their steps to those goals that are as yet unattained, assured that He who has led them to achieve such triumphs, and to store up such prizes in His Kingdom, will continue to assist them in enriching their spiritual birthright to a degree that no finite mind can imagine or human heart perceive."

Shoghi Effendi
Messages to the Bahá'í World

The first steps they took were to meet all the nearby Bahá'ís. There were two in Johnson City, one in Kingsport at the time, and one close by in another goal cluster. To meet local people they went to the farmer's market, library, visited with neighbors, had conversations with everyone they met while getting settled. This included the men who came to install appliances in their home and the woman at the bank where they opened an account. They kept track of everyone they met. They put their contact information on an excel spreadsheet and indicated their personal interests and connection to the Bahá'í Faith. They realized that everyone they talked with believed in God. So they invited everyone on their spreadsheet to a devotional meeting at their home. This was the first core activity they had. The first time, nobody came, but they went ahead with their program, read the Writings they had selected, and said prayers. They continued this every week for the first four months. Three sincere souls came on a regular basis to their home, including one woman who came almost every week and invited others to the devotional. She also kept the Bahá'í quotes because of her desire to share them on open circuit TV at the Veterans VA Hospital where she worked.

They learned that the local friends don't really feel comfortable coming to homes of people they don't know well, so they moved their devotional meeting to the public library and continue them monthly.

Also, they very consciously have conversations about the Faith every day. They put into practice the learnings gained from being in the Washington DC community while going through the institute courses. They ask themselves if they are having enough conversations and how to expand the number of contacts they have. When people ask them why they moved to the area, they tell them they are "here to serve their Faith and that they are Bahá'ís".

They had a wonderful opportunity to meet a seeker who inquired through the Seeker Response System. She came to the devotional meeting and declared her Faith that first evening! She had taken Book 1: *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* in St. Croix, Virgin Islands and is now taking Book 2: *Arising to*

Serve with Fredda and John and two Johnson City Bahá'ís who wished to accompany her. She practiced the first deepening theme "The Eternal Covenant" with her mother who is a committed Christian. This new believer also asked for help in having a devotional at her university in another city. In early January 2015 she hosted her first devotional gathering and invited some contacts and friends. The meeting was well organized and full of spirit! Fredda and John were delighted that their cluster had reached the "first milestone" status!

Service of homefront pioneers to help achieve the goals of the Five Year Plan

Atlantic Regional Homefront Pioneer and Mobile Resource Reflection Space

Twenty-four homefront pioneers and mobile tutors came to a reflection space hosted by the Regional Bahá'í Council of the Atlantic States January 10-11, 2015. They traveled from their home clusters in West Virginia, Tennessee, Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina to celebrate their advances and insights in their service and enjoy one another's support and encouragement. Counsellor Anita Williams and seven Auxiliary Board members who serve the Atlantic Region came to provide loving guidance and assistance. This was a unique and historic gathering for the region as it provided the first opportunity for friends who serve in these capacities to learn together.

The gathering lasted a day and a half and the atmosphere was infused with the pioneers' spirit of selfless dedication to their service. Their entire purpose for serving is to help achieve the 5,000 programs of growth goal given to us by the Universal House of Justice. The weekend was filled with thoughtful study of the guidance, reflection and sharing of insights. Role-playing and use of the arts helped to refresh the participants' energies and enthusiasm. They look forward to another pioneer-mobile tutor reflection space to be held later this year.



Homefront pioneers and mobile tutors are holding a picture they painted that reflects something beautiful in their cluster. These pictures, painted on cloth, were assembled later and sewn together to make a "pioneer quilt".

Goal clusters in Atlantic Region needing homefront pioneers

Can you help?

Can you give one to two years of your time to assist a cluster to reach the first milestone? We can see from the examples given in the newsletter and from the guidance it is not complicated.

Who can help with these goals?

- ◆ Students who are between undergraduate and graduate school and can give a period of service. Two dedicated young adults are serving at this time in their educational pursuit in a goal cluster in West Virginia.
- ◆ People who have job flexibility and can travel and live in a goal cluster 2-3 days a week. Two young adults are commuting from their home cluster to assist a goal cluster in eastern North Carolina.
- ◆ Those who are retired or plan to retire soon—see the inspiring example from Fredda and John.
- ◆ Any individual or family who has a deep desire to help achieve the 5,000 programs of growth goal.

How will you be assisted?

- ◆ The RTI coordinators assist with ongoing training spaces.

- ◆ The Regional Council holds periodic reflection spaces to support the homefront pioneers and mobile tutors.
- ◆ The Auxiliary Board members offer support for each homefront pioneer.
- ◆ The Regional Council has deputization funds that can provide some assistance for those in need.

The goal clusters that need homefront pioneers are:

North Carolina: Henderson Area, Eastern Mountains, and Stokes-Rockingham clusters

West Virginia: Northern Panhandle and Parkersburg clusters

Virginia: Farmville and Gloucester clusters

Kentucky: Bowling Green cluster

You can view these state maps with the cluster goals at www.rbcatlantic.org. Access the "Five Year Plan Goals" link at the top of the page. Scroll down and you can access each state map.

Who do you contact if you want to serve as a pioneer or mobile tutor or if you have questions?

- ◆ Contact the secretary of the Regional Bahá'í Council at rbcat.secretary@gmail.com.