



The Highway of Guidance

A Message from the Regional Bahá'í Council

Dear Friends in the Northeast region,

The Regional Baha'i Council is pleased to send you the second issue of *The Highway of Guidance*, a regional newsletter highlighting a sampling of the wonderful variety of activities taking place in the Northeast. Focused largely on the efforts of the friends during the second cycle of the One Year Plan, it covers everything- individual efforts, facilitation of the core activities, efforts for race unity, advancement of focus neighborhoods, building community, service in action, and so much more. The Council hopes that the stories shared here will inform and inspire you and your nucleus, community, and cluster as much as they informed and inspired us.

The Highway of Guidance is published once per cycle. If you have stories to share, please send them by December 15 to secretary@rbcne.usbnc.org. For the next issue, we are particularly requesting stories about what you are doing to commemorate the Centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha, but contributions about other activities are also welcome.

With loving regards,

Regional Baha'i Council of the Northeastern States

Engaging whole families in prayer in Roxbury, Massachusetts

With the easing of the coronavirus pandemic, the nucleus in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston had a great desire to connect in-person with whole family units to strengthen the devotional character of the neighborhood and to meet new protagonists. The nucleus met and prayed intensively for Divine confirmation, reviewed a [narrative of the efforts in Lower Delmarva](#) shared by their Auxiliary Board members, [watched an inspiring video](#) of a youth recounting a strategy to engage families in a conversation on prayer and service, and discussed how to adjust and apply the learnings from around the region to the local reality in Roxbury.



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Engaging whole families in prayer

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The idea the team arrived at was simple: engage whole families within a small pocket of the neighborhood in a conversation centered on family prayers. The initial conversation involved sharing prayers with families, reflecting with them on the power and impact of prayer, and openly inviting them to participate in a prayer campaign to pray for their neighborhood.

The team looked over its data, noting the number of children, junior youth, youth, and their associated families, plus other families connected to the neighborhood activities, and set an ambitious goal to begin 50 new family devotionals over an intensive 19-day period of outreach and conversations. The nucleus, all of whom work or go to school full time, set an intensive schedule for outreach. They decided to have at least two team members going into the field for a few hours each day, and the whole team would dedicate one day during the weekend to outreach and conversations. Every evening during the 19 days, the whole team reflected on their experiences and insights from the field that day, planned for the following days, and prayed for Divine confirmation and assistance.

To prepare for the conversations, the team reviewed [materials prepared by another team](#), and consulted on how to adapt them based on their knowledge of the reality in Roxbury, as well as their insights from the content seminar for the revised edition of Book 1.

Prayer was presented as a means to build bonds of friendship, love, unity, and justice in the community and/or family unit. Team members asked these neighbors how they think prayer could impact their community and family, leading to an open invitation to join the



of new children and junior youth joining groups and classes in the neighborhood. The nucleus has been reinvigorated by the campaign, and the friends have reflected on how dedicated, intensive, focused effort in the neighborhood not only yielded so many new participants and potential protagonists in the community building efforts, but brought about a greater unity among the nucleus as all were actively engaged in a process of collective action and reflection. The total number of activities in Roxbury rose from 22 to 70 in 19 days.

Some additional insights from the campaign:

devotional campaign in this initial conversation. As the team had more and more conversations, they adjusted their language and the sequence of ideas to implement what was being learned in the field. The daily rhythm of action and reflection meant that insights were quickly being generated about the nature of effective conversations, and everyone grew in their understanding of what words, concepts, and prayers would touch the hearts of those they were having a conversation with in Roxbury.

The team decided that regular home visits to these families beyond these 19 days would help to consolidate their efforts. To do this, the team plans to continue to visit families every week to build bonds of friendship, encourage the habit of prayer, and reflect on how it has impacted their families thus far. The team also plans to accompany eager families to reach out to other neighbors and share a vision of a community devotional space where families can gather and share their experiences with each other. The team is sensitive to other paths of service or study that may also arise for any member of the family.

A subtle shift in approach and mindset yielded great results. Whereas in the past, outreach and conversation was focused solely on identifying youth (or bolstering a single imperative), **the new approach of engaging the entire family unit meant that every individual was drawn into the community-building process through prayer**, while children, junior youth, and youth (if present) were extended special invitations to institute activities for their age group. We are excited to see how this new approach of engaging the entire family from the beginning will positively affect the participation and consistency of the children and junior youth involved in the program.

The campaign resulted in the establishment of nearly 50 new family devotionals, many mothers eager to learn more about teaching children's classes and starting to go through the institute, 5 youth wanting to serve as animators and children's class teachers who will start a Book 1 together, and a number

1. Not being shy or timid with sharing prayers in the first sentence or two of the conversation and trusting in the power of prayer.

2. Every individual has different needs, and their hearts are receptive to a variety of themes. The teacher should carefully listen and identify what kind of prayer might be appropriate (unity, healing, departed, etc.) and not stick to one kind of prayer. This was particularly effective for families that we had an existing connection with.

3. Some folks we meet already have a great connection and understanding of individual prayer and want to learn about community devotional spaces. We are now collectively as a community growing in our understanding of what a devotional space is that is infused with the Word of God and has the unique dimension of being open and welcoming to the entire population in Roxbury.

4. Bringing local friends (youth, junior youth, parents) to reflection, planning, and outreach is key to reaching a wider pool of participants. It was also crucial to quickly invite individuals to participate in outreach by asking, "Do you know of any other friends or neighbors who we can talk to together to invite them to participate in this campaign?", then going out with them and having them lead the invitation conversation, even after the initial conversation.

5. On some days, youth who were facilitating activities would want to do outreach for their activity, but still invite neighbors to the campaign. Beginning the conversation with the program they are familiar with (JYG or CC), then connecting it to prayer as an integral component of these programs, proved beneficial in engaging the whole family and quickly

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Engaging whole families in prayer

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including the families in the classes. An example of this invitation:

“Hi, I’m ___ and this is ___, and we are your neighbors. I facilitate a class for the spiritual education of children every week. These classes focus on developing a good character by practicing and learning about virtues. Every class we study prayers, which is a conversation with our Creator, and I was wondering if it would be ok if I shared a prayer with you.” --prayer sharing,



and reflection on the prayer-- *“have you ever thought about how prayer impacts families and the community? Can you imagine what our neighborhood would be like if everyone was praying? We would love to invite you to join our prayer campaign...”*

6. Quickly pivoting the conversation when what we start with isn’t what the individual is receptive to. For example, one door we knocked on was opened by a father who has lived in the community for a long time. We started by talking about the children’s classes and junior youth program (as a junior youth we had just met knew there were kids in that particular apartment and said we should go together to invite them), but quickly saw he had very strong views on the community and didn’t have any hope for its progress, leading to him saying he is not interested. Instead of thanking him and leaving, we pivoted to asking him how long he’s lived in the community, what changes he has seen so far, and what his concerns are. This allowed us to understand his needs and what he is receptive to more clearly- the concept of unity within the community. We then



asked to share the unity prayer, which led to us sharing a flyer with 5 themes and prayers from the children’s class. **There was a very clear shift in attitude once the prayers were read and conversations were had about them. He ended with asking for our contact information and said his children could come to the various activities.**

7. Not to be shy with inviting parents to think of themselves as protagonists in their children’s spiritual development by also inviting them to become teachers of children’s classes.

8. With families that we had an existing relationship with, we started off with sharing and reflecting with the parents about the content that their child has been engaging with recently, listening carefully to what the parents had to share, and then introducing prayers.

A West Philadelphia Story, Part 1

On March 11, 2021, as on most Thursday afternoons, two junior youth groups were taking place in the Christy Recreation Center in West Philadelphia, where their animators were diligently carrying out their service...one, inside the center continuing study of one of the books of the program, and the other, out on the basketball court, enjoying a hearty game of hoops. Just one hour after these junior youth and their animators left the center to go home, a group of young people arrived at the same basketball court and shot several youth who continued to play ball there. 15-year-old Kahree, a friend to some of the junior youth in those groups, died that evening.

As news of this event reached the animators and other youth serving in the neighborhood the next day, a meeting was arranged to pray together and consult about the conversations that would follow with the junior youth, their parents, other youth and neighbors, all of which would be concerned about the safety of the children and youth. They knew that parents would be concerned about having their junior youth return to the center where the murder had occurred. It was clear that new meeting spaces might have to be considered. Meanwhile, an emergency

community meeting was set up in coordination with the Head of Parks and Recreation, the Chief of Police, and several other commissioners and neighborhood organizers. The Baha’i team serving the neighborhood also made plans to attend this meeting.

Prayers at the morning meeting were potent and heartfelt, and the Auxiliary Board member and a member of the Regional Council offered words of support and encouragement to the neighborhood team. They listened as they refined their approach of supporting their groups, making home visits to the parents, praying for the neighborhood, and requesting more support for the junior youth and other youth activities from the officials at the community meeting later that day.

At the community meeting, the Baha’is were surprised when they realized how many of the neighbors they knew and how many had become true friends. After the official presentations, the Baha’is offered comments about the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program and described how they have been working with so many in the neighborhood. They asked for support in the

“At the community meeting, the Baha’is were surprised when they realized how many of the neighbors they knew and how many had become true friends.”

form of safe spaces to hold these activities and also spoke of the need to develop closer relationships in the community. They spoke about how the programs they are serving

offer spaces to nurture such relationships. They then offered to have prayers on the basketball court after the meeting for peace and protection of the children, and several people at the meeting joined the Baha’is for this impromptu devotional gathering.

Devotionals continued on the basketball court for several weeks following the meeting, and friendships were forged among a few concerned neighbors. A town watch group was reformed, Baha’is joined this group to nurture these relationships, and several neighbors attended other devotionals held on the block as well.

Following the community meeting, animators recounted that many upgrades were made to the rec center: new fencing was placed all around the perimeter and the grounds enjoyed better upkeep;

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A West Philadelphia Story, Part 1

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fresh paint covered old graffiti and improved lighting was now kept on throughout the night ... and there is now even a constant police presence during the day and at night ... all helping to give confidence to the community that they would be safer now and that officials were listening. As a service project, the junior youth had previously submitted a sketch for a mural they hoped to paint on the side of the recreation center to beautify the building and show a community working together. After many months of not receiving any notice of its acceptance, there were now new opportunities to present it again, and it is currently under renewed consideration.

And, at the same time, the neighborhood team increased their visits and conversations with parents about the safety of their children and the need to keep these vital activities in the lives of their junior youth. They were able to share more information about the content of the activities on these

visits and say prayers with these parents as well. Despite their best efforts, one of the junior youth groups ... that of older junior youth 14-15 years old ... was losing participation and when they investigated, the parents were not willing to send them back to that center out of fear. But upon consultation, every parent agreed to allow their children to attend if it were held at the home of the animator! How beautiful to know such trust had been gained!

One day as the other junior youth group was at the center, they realized that Parks and Recreation had added their activities to their printed poster that was on the door. That was a very welcome surprise since they had not even requested it.

As the permanency of space to hold junior youth groups was in question, and the animators were making visits to families on a particular street — Addison Street — where many of the junior youth and children in the children's class live, they noticed an abandoned lot next to the home of one of the junior youth. They found that one youth wanted to plant tomatoes there and another mother wished the junior youth group could be held there. Soon they

decided to go to every home on the block, all together ... youth, junior youth, children's class teachers and animators ... to find out what the neighbors thought about fixing up that empty space on their block. A date was set and the whole block was invited to help clear out the lot of trash and weeds. Multiple families came together to help, and many conversations that day led to an increase in children and junior youth participating in the program. A middle school teacher living on the street brought supplies for the cleanup and participated in devotions on her porch. Ongoing conversations are leading to many ideas of how she might serve these processes.

Work proceeds on the vacant lot, and plans for flowers and seating are continuing. Conversations and energy are increasing. This is a story of crisis followed by victories...step by step to build a community!



A West Philadelphia Story, Philadelphia, PA, Part 2



"Street sign at Addison Street in Philadelphia" by Андрей Романенко is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

The challenges during the initial months of the pandemic disconnected us from many families in the neighborhood, including our friends living on the 5500 block of Addison Street. The below narrative provides a glimpse into how home visits to reconnect with the junior youth on that block have led to a service opportunity. Assisting the youth and children with their efforts to beautify their block has naturally deepened our existing relationships with those friends and created opportunities to connect with more households on the same block. With each subsequent visit to our friends and their families, we're seeing glimmerings of an entire block becoming connected to

and learning from the Revelation of Baha'u'llah.

On the 5500 block of Addison Street, there are around 30 households; we've had introductory conversations about the institute process with around 13 of those households, and 6 households are currently involved in various core activities. Around the same time we began visiting these families, there was a series of shootings in the area immediately around the local recreation center where we held children's class and junior youth group prior to the pandemic. In consultation with the junior youths' parents, our nucleus began considering other locations to hold the junior youth groups and children's classes. We remembered one of the families on Addison Street lived next to a vacant lot.

During a home visit to the family, we asked the mom about the property and whether we could hold group meetings there. The mom became very excited and explained that they had been wanting to fix up that space for a while but just hadn't gotten around to it. Her daughter suggested we could plant flowers and tomatoes, an idea she had brought up with her junior youth group. The mom then suggested that we should reach out to another neighbor on the block who could help with the project.

Along with a few of the junior youth and children, we went to visit the neighbor who works as a middle school teacher and readily incorporates moral education into her lessons. She was eager to offer her support and assistance with whatever activities happened, even encouraging us to hold the group on the block. A few weeks later, a total of 7 junior youth, 3 children, 4 youth, and 1 adult assembled to help. The junior youth suggested we start with picking up trash, and the school teacher offered us gloves, bags, and shovels. While we were picking up trash, multiple neighbors approached us to express their gratitude for what the youth were doing and hoped to see more acts of service. On that day, we connected with more families than before, and many of their children have joined the neighborhood children's class. After picking up as much trash as we could, we gathered on the vacant lot and had a discussion around "how do we make this block even more beautiful?" After consulting about various ideas, they decided that we needed to talk with each neighbor on the block.

The following week, armed with clipboards and pencils, 2 youth, 18 junior youth, 2 adults (including 1 parent), and many children volunteered to talk with the other

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A West Philadelphia Story, Part 2

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neighbors. After a sung prayer, we broke off into teams and picked sides of the street to start interviewing the neighbors. The energy and enthusiasm of the group was electric!

Attempting to speak with each neighbor on the block helped us learn more about the reality of the households on Addison Street. A few of the houses are permanently vacant, whereas most of the homes belonged to elderly folks. After speaking with as many neighbors as we could, the teams shared some of the common sentiments from the neighbors and discussed

next steps. Most of the neighbors suggested either planting a garden or having it be a play area. The group decided that we should start with pulling the weeds and began consulting on details for the next week.

During weekly visits to the block, we're also intentionally having conversations with the parents about the importance of spiritual education for the youth but also about prayer in the family. One mother in particular is ready to visit other families on the block to explore the possibility of starting a block devotional in support of the youth.



Engaging families in Roxbury, Massachusetts

A Labor of Mixtape, Perseverance, and Love in Poughkeepsie, NY

I had a neighbor who I meant to get to know but never did until she was actually moving out of the apartment right next to mine. When I found out she was moving, I was so crushed! I actually cried because I felt that I had let Baha'u'llah down by not being more proactive in getting to know her. And when I finally got a chance, on this, one of her last days in the apartment to get to know her - it turned out that she was having so many tests and difficulties - I could have been a friend to her, but had not been. Praise be to God - we have a bunch of devotional activities via Zoom, and we had the Baha'i Women of African Descent sisters' gathering, which I could invite her to. SO I did. I invited her to the sisters' gathering. Because the Mixtape Devotional gathering came up before the next sisters' gathering, I invited her to that, and - she came! As a matter of fact, she came a couple of times. She did NOT come to the sisters' gathering. And, then she moved out west - I think she moved to Texas. So, she stopped coming altogether. Despite multiple times reaching out to her, she just stopped communicating.

I had conceived of the Mixtape Devotional Gathering because of how often my processing of the Writings, my synthesis of learnings from my Christian upbringing with my learnings now as a Baha'i, happen when I'm listening to Gospel music. So I envisioned an opportunity to share that learning and invite others into it. And I found the courage to start that gathering when one of the sisters said to me, "I wish I could just come to a gathering and PRAY - I don't want to turn on the camera nor read out loud. Zoom is sometimes too demanding." And so - with that, the Mixtape Devotional was launched. No

mics. No cameras. Anyone who wants to share their thoughts, reflections, prayer requests, can do so in the chat - and sometimes interesting discussions ensue. But what happens is I am juxtaposing scripture with songs and talking briefly to weave a narrative to hold it all together.

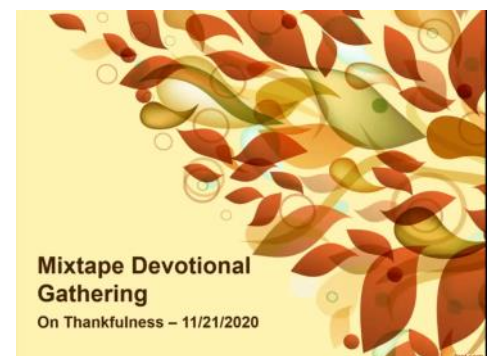
It is a lot of work. I started out doing it weekly, and then shifted to monthly. The numbers really were not there to support the effort which involved finding the songs, finding the narrative, and researching the scriptures. I've asked for assistance - and I was so honored to have Laura co-host with me one week. She found most of the songs, and we were on mic together. It was fun, and inspiring. AND... A LOT OF WORK!

Well, my life has been topsy-turvy of late, and so I have just not done it! Last one was in May - it is now August. But I got a call from John Watson advising that a seeker was interested, and so for the sake of that seeker, I went ahead and held the Mixtape Devotional Gathering today. John showed up. The seeker did not. BUT... my long-lost neighbor also showed up - out of the blue!

The Mixtape Devotional is unique, in that it is almost entirely a gift to the community - almost all the labor is on me, and if folks don't show up, it can feel like a waste - I put it out on YouTube, but because of copyright issues, I can't really promote it. But today was a reminder that the labor is not in vain. I do not know what made my former neighbor show up today, but I am glad that she did - and I know that she would not have if I had not stepped forward to offer it. So - I

think I will try again to hold them once a month as promised. Just in case some soul finds value.

Here are some examples of the Mixtape Devotional:



Retreat for Service in Ithaca, NY

On August 15th, the Bahá'ís of Ithaca, NY hosted a one-day retreat at Cayuga Lake State Park. The theme of the retreat was Service, and as this year coincides with the 100 year anniversary of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Baha, examples and stories from His life informed much of the spirit of the discussions.

After a plenary devotional, the more than 80 attendants, about 16 of them friends of the Faith, split into age based groups to perform acts of service and reflect on the meaning of service as a driver of community life. In the adult session, the approximately 50 participants shared stories about the life of 'Abdu'l-Baha and then studied and discussed letters from the Universal House of Justice, and the Ruhi books about the topics of social discourse and social action. The junior youth undertook an analysis of the methods by which advertisers may create narratives of material possessions being the key to fulfillment. The youth served as teachers and service coordinators for the children.

The retreat marked a welcome relief from the isolation of the COVID pandemic and aimed to provide a safe but spiritually and socially refreshing gathering of souls interested in participating in service.

To see wonderful photos of the retreat, please click on [a link to a folder with lots of photos.](#)

Note: the photos are not for sharing beyond this publication.

For your enjoyment and use during this year of the commemoration of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Baha, here is [Wilmette Institute – 129 Stories Of Abdul Baha | Earl Redman and Sharon O'Toole.](#) Click on [over 100 stories about 'Abdu'l-Bahá.](#)



Expanding Home Visits in Rochester, NY

The Expansion Phase was coming to an end, and, with one more day left, the friends in the Rochester cluster had made **82 (!) home visits** during these three weeks! The next day, during the **Celebration of the Expansion Phase**, they planned to have a chance to rejoice, share stories of what had happened, reflect on the experience, and make plans to follow up and consolidate all of their efforts.

These are a few of the vignettes of the home visits that took place:

When a home visit to a friend of the Faith opens the possibility for conversations about a children's class to start with many children

potentially joining, all of them Friends of the Faith too!

I was visiting my friend to help him with some personal paperwork. Some of his family members and other acquaintances had participated in children's classes in the past. I spent a good amount of time with the family. They (the extended family) had just moved to a new large house. It is next door to his sister's house. He showed me the basement which he wants to convert into a Baha'i children's classroom. (!!) He is talking to his neighbors about children's classes. He believes there are more than 8 participants ready to go!

When meaningful conversations happen when you least expect them, including while picking blueberries!

I was picking blueberries at the CSA farm we belong to, and there was one other couple picking near me. We started a conversation that quickly got elevated. They talked about their daughter and how they didn't let their kids watch tv for the first 10 years. They were talking about a Christian school she was enrolled in. I remarked how wonderful it was to meet parents who understood the 2 fold moral purpose. Then I explained what that

meant. After that, the conversation just flowed so naturally. The man was Native American, and they belonged to Ganandagon, and we talked about Kevin Locke and about Baha'i. We all walked back to the car together slowly and talked some more. Our hearts were filled with joy for having connected with each other. I will see them again at the farm and at Ganandagon to continue our conversation.

When Home visits could happen, then don't happen, and then a surprise comes in!

My neighbor agreed to study a prayer with me. Excitement! She was busy and asked to wait a few days. After a few days, I approached the subject of setting a time for the visit. She said that upon reflection she didn't have the practice of READING prayers in her life, so she decided she wouldn't participate in studying a prayer with me. Disappointment! The very next thing that came out her mouth was that she wanted to learn more about the Baha'i Faith itself. Would I sit down with her and talk about the Faith? Joy!

When home visits and prayers happen at one's home!

"We invited 3 people to visit us at our home. One is not a Baha'i. Prayers; conversation; and out for supper. All were uplifted and planned to meet again next week."



Engaging families in Roxbury, Massachusetts

Gladdening the Heart of the Master in Holyoke, MA

When thinking about ways to observe the 100th anniversary of the Ascension of our Beloved Master, one idea that comes to mind is to consider what would most gladden His heart. We know that a dimension of the service in which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was always involved was to care for the poor, the sick, the helpless and the needy -- what kind of things could we do in our own city that would bring Him happiness? Is there some special service that we could provide in His name to honor His memory, through which we might convey a glimpse of His loving care in the places where we live?

In order to build connections with people in our community, our family has realized that we need to be intentional about meeting others, since two usual ways of making connections (jobs and school) are not available to us. Making use of summer’s nice weather, we prayerfully decided that we would go out on walks with the hope of meeting people and striking up conversations. On our first day out, we went to one of the parks in our town. Some people sat on the benches there, while others walked through.

We were attracted to a group who obviously cared for each other. Middle

aged, older, and even younger members of this group were sitting together in chairs they had brought, laughing and talking. We sat on a bench not too far away and prayed. Soon, a woman in her 20’s walked past with a little dog. The dog was the topic that led to a deeper conversation with this lovely young woman. We learned that she was one of the founders of the gathering we had noticed, which was an AA group that meets every day in the park at noon. After 15 minutes of heart-to-heart conversation about the journey of life we are all on, we said our goodbyes, knowing that we would be seeing each other again - we know where to find her!

As we sat on the bench and looked around one last time before leaving, we noticed the trash that is littering the park. This inspired us to return another day to clean up the park and hopefully have more conversations with people we meet. We will be bringing little prayer cards along with us when we do this to be able to share them with anyone who is interested in making this connection.



Veterans' Memorial Park, Holyoke, Massachusetts.

Bed-Stuy Youth Movement Narrative, Brooklyn, NY

Over the past year and a half, we have had a small but dedicated group of youth that has been advancing together through the main sequence of courses. These youth are all graduates of the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program and have now known each other for many years. Several of them recently completed Book 3 and now are being accompanied to teach children’s classes. It has been exciting to see these youth gradually taking more ownership over this process and their consciousness of Baha’u’llah’s vision for a materially and spiritually prosperous humanity growing with each passing day.

For a recent expansion phase, our team set a goal of having conversations with 50 youth in hopes of inviting a new cohort of youth from our neighborhood into Book 1. However, during the pandemic it has been challenging to meet new youth. We decided that one strategy we could employ is to go through pre-existing lists of all the youth and junior youth we have been in conversation with over the five years that we have had activities in the neighborhood. We found that many of the junior youth that we had been in conversation with are now youth. One night we went to the door of one of these junior

youth, and his mother answered. When we introduced ourselves, she instantly remembered the program and was excited to see us. We shared that we still have junior youth groups and children’s classes as well as youth nights where youth can gather together and study courses that help them develop qualities, attitudes, and skills to be of service to their communities. Right away she called her children to their door. The former junior youth we had come to see was now a 19-year-old youth, and his six-year-old brother followed behind him. The youth also remembered the program right away, and we began to speak to all three of them about the community building efforts already underway in the neighborhood and invited them to join. The children’s class that some of the youth in our neighborhood are teaching was actually taking place the next day, so we invited the younger brother to join and then invited the youth to join the youth gathering that takes place on Fridays after the children’s class. At the end of our warm conversation, the mother offered us water, cough drops, and hand sanitizer—true pandemic hospitality!

The next day, the mother, younger brother, and the youth all were outside at the park for the children’s class. The mother sat on a bench and watched as her son partook in the children’s class and the youth watched on and right away saw other youth from his neighborhood nurturing the spiritual education of children. Through this simple confluence of events, one can see how an entire family can enter the process and, furthermore, how a youth can immediately see what it means to be a protagonist—not through words, but by seeing the action of other youth in the community.

Prior to the youth gathering, I went with another member of my team to visit a youth who is also a children’s class teacher to ask if he was able to come to youth night. Initially, he was dragging his feet, unsure if he wanted to leave his house on that particular Friday. However, when we told him a new youth would be joining us, his face lit up and he instantly said he wanted to come because it was important to him to welcome this youth. I thought to myself that this must be what it truly means for a youth to feel a sense of ownership over this process —

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Bed-Stuy Youth Movement Narrative

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a light goes off inside of them when given the opportunity to share it with someone new. That night, our youth gathering was truly joyful. Our veteran youth who had been attending over the past year were excited by a new youth joining us, and it was clear that they wanted him to feel welcome. Suddenly, it felt less like those of us who are accompanying the youth were the hosts of the gathering, but rather, that the youth were hosting one another. It was truly a special sight to see. My heart felt warm thinking about how as more and more youth join them and they continue to develop bonds defined by true friendship and service, the light within these youth will grow brighter and brighter and attract more and more hearts. Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá!

Knowing My Neighbors in the Hartford Tolland, CT Cluster

One of the friends wrote to us regarding the "Know My Neighbors" teaching project!

For the 90 days starting May 1, every evening this Baha'i planned to walk her neighborhood with her puppy, Cooper, and, for an hour (wearing a mask of course), to try to say hello, introduce herself, and extend friendship to the people she encountered in her neighborhood. She hoped that, if she walked the same path every day, that after a few months she would deepen friendships and meet more people in the neighborhood. Then, her plan was to pray and reflect on where to go from there. Ultimately, she would love to extend invitations to neighbors to join her for prayers and possibly see if setting up a children's class and or a junior youth group in the neighborhood would be possible. She invited others to walk with her on day(s) that would work for them.



Big Things Happening in a Small Town in Franklin, NH



collective campaign for its expansion phase around elevated discussions. Through the Book 1 Seminar and the Teaching Conferences before that, I had begun compiling a list of local contacts by utilizing the concentric circles.

Initially, I developed a list of names of 15 women in Franklin who are the mothers of junior youth or others whom I've gotten to know through various wider-community projects over the years. I use Facebook a LOT, to not only share what the junior youth group is doing, but also to share posts related to the Faith, along with photos of nature and gardening, etc. I view this as one important way to connect and communicate, especially last year, when I was working 60+ hours a week. Other than my work, most of my activity was virtual due to the pandemic.

"Reflections on the Light of the Spirit" (Ruhi Book 1). Once I began sending this invitation, engaged in some lovely back-and-forth written "conversations", and guided by prayer, I thought of additional women friends (all still in Franklin). Eventually, I sent the invitation on Messenger to 23 women! Most politely declined, but, even among those who declined, all expressed appreciation at being asked to participate. I noticed heightened conversation, both through Facebook comments and from hearing their remarks in person (such as at the farmer's market) among those whom I invited. Even that act has created a deeper relationship.

Before I flew home, eight women had expressed interest in attending the women's spiritual reflection group and were ready to

(continued on Page 9)

I was so inspired by the beautiful letter which the Regional Baha'i Council sent to the Northeast region for the Feast of Nur! It's arrival coincided with the end of the school year, and a completely free summer for me! I appreciated the bullet-item format which enabled me to identify specific actions and goals I could take in my own community of Franklin NH which would help provide an advance in our cluster. As that letter urged us to share our stories, these are some of the exciting developments thus far.

Through my participation in the Book 2 Seminar, I received encouragement and developed the capacity to have meaningful conversations as our cluster prepared for a

Immediately after the school year ended, I traveled out of state to visit my children. Not wanting to waste time before my return home, I wrote a generic, welcoming invitation to send individually on Messenger, asking the friends I'd identified on Facebook and who were not working full-time whether they would be interested in joining a weekly, daytime "women's spiritual reflection group." This would take place at my home in the summer with a focus on



English tea in the garden

Big Things Happening in Franklin

(continued from Page 8)



begin the week I returned. So far, only three of those eight have been able to attend, but three others are at least in touch each week, letting me know what prevented their attendance. Another Baha'i from nearby Concord, NH is accompanying me. The members of our lovely group, all of whom are thoroughly enjoying Book 1, range from a professed atheist, to a devout Catholic, to a "born again" Christian, to two Baha'is. Some, but not all, knew each other already. Two of the women are quite influential in our town of 8,500 people. All those invited are familiar with the junior youth groups that I've animated in Franklin for nine years now.

Beyond the Book 1 study circle, yet another junior youth group which will have two younger siblings of current members at its core, will officially form when school starts. Each sibling is excited about inviting friends. Meanwhile, it is hoped that the current three members, who are all entering high school at age 14, will continue in a study of "Spirit of Faith", one of the titles in the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program, which we will begin at a brief camp at the end of August at the lake home of a Baha'i couple. If the COVID situation remains stable, we plan to return to the Recreation & Parks Community Center (the "Rec.") which has been our "home" since 2013 for our weekly meetings. (We have met outside, in my yard or the park, all summer, and limped through on Zoom before that.)

Now, as of last week, one of our 14-year old junior youth wishes to co-teach (with me and possibly one of her own friends) a Baha'i children's class! This will also be at the Rec., since Krystal, the City's Recreation and Parks Director, has been an invaluable protagonist for the past eight years and has provided a wonderful free space, promotion, participant registration, and more. The junior youth interested in co-teaching and her mother are moving this process forward. They are making lists of children, talking to the children's parents, and inviting them! The junior youth

and I meet weekly to study parts of Ruhi Book 3 and plan the lessons (for Grade 1). The children's class started on August 4, and already we have three children confirmed to join us: two younger siblings of our junior youth and a friend of one of them.

My goal is to be able to sustain these activities once school starts, as I will only be working 6 hours a day. I think it's doable with the following schedule:

- Mondays at 5pm, meet with children's class co-teacher(s);
- Tuesdays at 4pm, consult with Book 1 co-tutor;
- Thursdays (currently 10am, hoping move to 4pm) "women's group" studying Book 1;
- Fridays at 7pm (as I have been doing since 2012) Junior Youth Group.

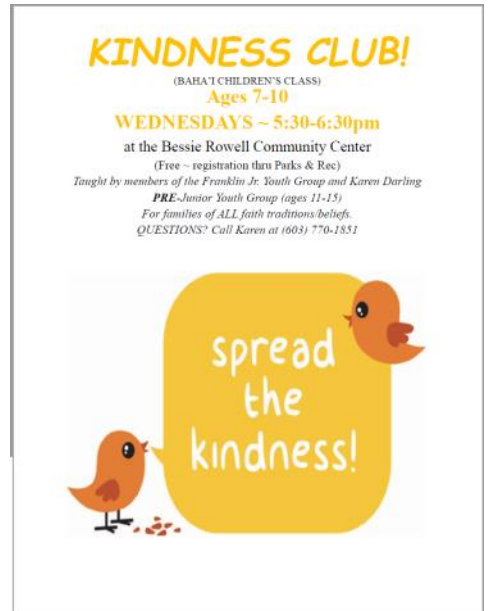
What is most exciting to me is watching community-building in action! Though only a tiny Baha'i community (just me and my husband who provides MUCH support for my own activities!) in this small city of 8,500 people, we've been striving — patiently persevering — to infuse the town through our prayers, words and actions, with the teachings of Baha'u'llah, striving to follow in the footsteps of 'Abdu'l-Baha. With regard to prayers, we have one nightly and one weekly family devotional, along with one monthly public gathering. One of the junior youth families also has a nightly, family devotional. I suspect that, in the almost 10 years we've lived here, well over a thousand people of Franklin know that we are Baha'is and, thus, know a little about the Faith and have a positive impression. It's so wonderful to see whole families now arising as protagonists! It's a beautiful journey, and I feel blessed to be on this path.

P.S. Included here are a few pics -- three from our Book 1 study circle: the group of women demonstrating "Truthfulness is the foundation on all human virtues" and showing bookmarks we made with quotations we are memorizing -- and three from the junior youth group: our

completion of "Drawing on the Power of the Word", our community service project (adopt-a-garden), and an outing ("English tea" in a local garden) to celebrate text completion.

P.P.S. Update:

Yesterday I received my first call from a parent interested in having his son entering 6th grade join the new junior youth group starting up. We had a nice conversation. His call alerted me to the fact that the Recreation & Parks Department had published their Fall newsletter -- [attached](#), see pages 4 and 5!



The "Kindness Club" on page 4 is the new Baha'i children's class that a junior youth and I are starting.

The junior youth group, page 5, has been featured in the Parks & Rec's seasonal newsletters and on the [City website](#) — scroll down to "Ongoing Programs" — for eight years now. Krystal Alpers, the Parks & Rec director, is our most steadfast and valued protagonist -- The City "sponsors" these activities (so does the Assembly of Concord NH), thus providing incredible space at no charge, free promotion including color copies of fliers, and most importantly credibility -- parents TRUST the program even if they have not met me.





Celebrating completion of "Drawing on the Power of the Word" in Franklin, NH

Social Media Initiative in Rochester, NY

Our neighbors are clearly seeking productive discourse and rational meaning in a confused and divided world.

Our team has been working weekly on the 'Meaningful Conversations' initiative with the National team, which provides:

- a weekly theme on a topic of contemporary popular interest, along with
- a series of quotes from the Writings on the topic
- guidance as to how to present it
- the logistics of social media advertising
- suggestions on how to track attendance and follow up on interest

Although we began in person, we now hold an event on Zoom each Sunday night for about 90 minutes where we explore issues prevalent in public discourse such as: *'is there a cure for racism'*, *'life after life'*, or *'spiritual economy'*. The events are advertised on Facebook, Meetup, and Eventbrite, and a variety of members from our greater community show up to participate each week - self-selected from their interest in the topic.

The learning has been that our participants are seeking to engage with a community that harmonizes their logical inquiry and the deep yearnings of their souls with deeper principles and concepts of meaning and rationality to come to a better understanding of the world around them and to develop a new frame of reference. Once they feel a connection with our group based on this spiritual resonance, the door opens to building deeper bonds of friendship. Their continued interest leads to very natural conversations on the core spiritual matters

that are addressed through entering a Book 1 - not in a forced manner, but as a natural process in their quest for deeper understanding. When we think about the Institute process, our thoughts are drawn to it as a means of better understanding the ways of the Master and learning how to walk in His footsteps and follow His example in presenting concepts.

The 'Meaningful Conversations' initiative has exposed us to the general public in a very direct manner and has helped us to develop the capacity to interact with our neighbors on significant topics. We do this in light of the perspective offered by the Writings while not pushing an agenda: in a manner attempting to follow the example of the Master. As their souls become stirred and our friendships develop, deeper questions arise as to the source of the Writings. The conversation naturally goes toward feeding their souls through a deeper exploration of the concepts in Book 1, which, in turn, introduces the concepts that have led to devotional gatherings addressing the critical issues directly affecting our greater community. These include poverty, rampant violence, and persistent inequality. This process has also highlighted the importance of consecrated commitment to these relationships and the long-term dedication required to sustainably engage a community. This is critical for going from the

idea of this initiative being a series of social media 'events' into an opportunity to begin the long-term accompaniment process with our neighbors. These experiences have been very joyful for our team and greatly enhance the dimensions of our understanding of the Institute process as a 'mighty enterprise of vast spiritual potential' as we build veritable bonds of friendship with the participants and encounter the priceless experience of accompanying our neighbors into the path of service.



Community service in Franklin, NH

NY Times Bestselling Author Highlights Bahá'í Teachings in her new book on YouTube

In April, the Alma and Joseph Gildenhorn Book Series featured Amanda Ripley, New York Times best selling author. She can be seen on YouTube speaking about her new book "High Conflict: Why We Get Trapped and How We Get Out" and how the Baha'i Faith is a model for avoiding conflict. Click the [YouTube link](#) to view Amanda Ripley being interviewed about her new book.



Creating and Creative in Marlborough, Massachusetts

Starting in February, some of the ladies we have reached through our one-every-48 hours devotional "Soul Circle" began meeting one Sunday a month (over Zoom, for now) in the afternoon to sew, knit, crochet, or otherwise create while sharing prayers, poems, and songs. Baha'is and their friends attend, and this will now be ongoing. Led by a Baha'i from Marlboro and another from Hudson, a neighboring community, this is yet another way to share the Writings while keeping in touch with each other and building meaningful relationships!



Practical Tips From Scarborough, ME

Well! I can say the Scarborough food drive was a great success. In two days we had 14 shopping carts full of food, completely filling an SUV on Saturday and a pick-up truck on Sunday. We did Saturday and Sunday, 10 – 4. In addition to the food, shoppers contributed over \$500. The man at the pantry said that we likely set a record!

I would like to share the why and wherefore with the friends. This is a great ice-breaker for Baha'is in the community. People will hear the name of the Baha'i Faith and will have a good feeling about our service. This is not a direct teaching event, although some people might be curious and ask about the Faith. Nonetheless, you might wish to start with prayers beforehand.

First, plan a month or more in advance. Line up with the food bank you intend to give to and the grocery store where you intend to hold your drive. Solicit volunteers from your community and the Baha'is around. Also, depending on your town, you might have your food drive announced on local radio or TV throughout the day(s). Find out how early you must list with them. It often has to be sometime in advance for non-profit announcements. Again, we frequently get to announce the name of the Baha'i Faith throughout the area. This is a great opportunity for youth to get community service hours for graduation. In the few days before, make sure you line up boxes;

banana and apple boxes are sturdy and are the best.

Make 100 posters (should last both days). It has a "wish list" of non-perishable items the pantry wants AND items they don't need as they get these from the government. Re-type the list.

On top put **Food Drive to support _____ Food Pantry sponsored by the Baha'i Community of _____.**

On the bottom, type **Please return this list to us so we can "recycle" it for others.** People no longer seem to be concerned about spreading Covid by touch.

Have easels if you can. Otherwise, tape signs to a shopping cart. Make up a poster board sized sign (more than one if several entrances) that says:

FOOD DRIVE

to help our neighbors at

_____ Food Pantry

Sponsored by the

Baha'is of _____

perhaps another that says

Donations gratefully accepted for

_____ Food Pantry.

(So people don't think the money is going to the Baha'is)

Have a can for contributions. You will be surprised about how much you will collect. Keep an eye on this can. Unfortunately, there is always someone who might steal it.

Friends can plan on working 10 to 1 or 1 to 4 or both for one or both days. Post at least 2 people at each entrance so you won't miss as many folks going into the store. Collect food contributions and cash donations. Be uplifting, happy, and thankful. Pack food in boxes as they come in. Hold in the store's baskets if necessary. Arrange that you will deliver to the food pantry or that they will pick them up.

Customers are moving fast, so practice your delivery until you can say it quickly and easily, "Hello. We're with the Baha'i Community of _____ and this weekend we are supporting the _____ Food Pantry. Here is a wish list of non-perishable items they can use. If you would like to purchase a few of these, you can leave them here with us. Also, please return the list to us so we can re-use it for others. Thanks for your help." Some will be in a hurry and may often make a cash donation instead. Others will say they can't help right now (Maybe they need to know about the food bank?). Sometimes folks will just ignore you and keep on walking. ALWAYS be kind and patient. Thank them with a smile.

Stop giving out flyers about 45 minutes before quitting time so you won't have

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Practical Tips From Scarborough, ME

(continued from Page 11)

stragglers in the store after you leave. Deliver your food and money. Pack your gear and signs to go home. A thank you note to the store is in order. You will sleep well tonight, guaranteed.

We were hugely successful at the food drive thanks to Baha'i youth in our community. They manned one entrance both days allowing us to get twice as many contacts going into the store. We would have only done half as well without them! They held up their share and then some and helped make our record-breaking contribution.

Food pantries get a lot of contributions for Thanksgiving and Christmas, so plan on doing summer/early fall or late winter/spring when the need is greater. You might even decide to do this as an annual or even semi-annual event. By the way, if you only intend to do a food drive for one day, I recommend that Saturday is busier than Sunday. Baha'i-wise, I got to speak to five customers who asked me about the Faith. I assume the others occasionally got to explain the Faith over the course of the weekend also. This is a win-win. Food pantry gets the food, and we get recognition for tangible service to the community and an occasional teaching opportunity.

Addressing Social Justice in Oxford, CT

The Baha'is of Oxford were invited to attend a new Social Justice Group along with all of the churches in Oxford. The group currently has nine members and is continuing to do one-on-one meetings with Oxford residents in town to address the social issues that are being specifically identified in Oxford. The first meeting at the Catholic Church included a member of the board of directors from "Team," a social service agency in the Valley. Another member of the group is Kim, a representative of The Naugatuck Valley Regional group, whose primary mission is affordable housing. The Valley consists of the municipalities of Naugatuck, Shelton, Ansonia, Oxford, and Derby.

Local Baha'is anticipated attending a Valley picnic in June, including networking and a talk at Osbornedale Park. Ben, a paid member of a Social Justice group who works out of Philadelphia, was running the event. The mission was to address the needs of each town's disadvantaged citizens.

The organizer for the Oxford group has been meeting with one of the local Baha'is for coffee and chatting about the town. They are getting to know each other -- they have met five times since May 1st.

Thinking Outside the Box in Upper ME

My current project has been "A walk in the Park." I go to the local park and set up a card table and chairs along a walkway. I have a sign/poster that has three panels. The first panel says "The Baha'i Faith." The second says "Spiritual Health and Awareness for You." The third panel says "Unity, Peace and Racial Accord." I have Baha'i "business cards" for those that want them. I am passive and not in your face about it, but for those who ask me, I give a short introduction to the Faith and answer questions if they ask. Otherwise, the person's curiosity is satisfied and they go on their merry way. Next time I think I will add a canopy for my site, not because I need much protection from sun or rain, but rather to increase curiosity and so more people will stop by. There have been no objections to my being there. I spoke to the Parks and Recreation Director about this, and he was OK with it as long as I didn't obstruct people on the walking path. This might be a good way to reach out to people, assuming the Baha'i doing it is a bit of an extrovert and good with conversation.

Serving the Community

in Hartford, VT

The Listen Center in White River Junction, VT announced plans to resume scheduling volunteers to prepare and serve evening meals to residents in the area. The need to provide healthy meals has increased during these times of Covid. "Baha'is and Friends" from the Upper Valley cluster planned to continue their service on the fourth Saturdays of each month starting in July.

O God! Educate these children in Dublin, NH

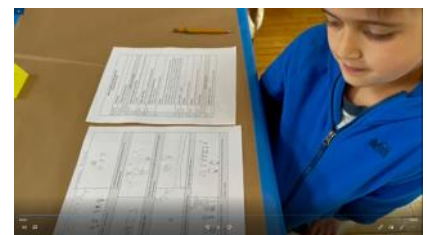
Dublin, NH saw its first children's class, and what a wonderful beginning it was with everyone in the Baha'i community contributing to the effort! Plans are in place to build from here, so stay tuned for further growth. Meanwhile, take a look at [this link to a video](#) showing highlights from the first session of this new opportunity so that the children will "be trained, grow and develop, and appear in the utmost beauty."

Newly Born Chicks Teach Gentleness in Littleton, NH

Children's classes are held every Sunday morning at the Deeper Roots Farm in Littleton, NH. Last October, two mothers that had been attending firesides asked if we could start children's classes for their children. We started with four children and, in March, another mother with one child joined our class! We now have a total of five children ages 3 – 6. During the winter months, we held our classes in a large greenhouse, and now, with the nicer weather, we have our classes outside. We lay a large tarp on the ground and put down a quilt with cushions for sitting which makes a "Sacred Circle" for prayers, a virtue lesson, and singing. We have a musical activity of marching or dancing and an art project. We end with a prayer and snack time for the children. This last week our virtue was "Gentleness". The Deeper Roots farm had a shipment of "little chicks," and our activity for the children was holding the chicks. It was a special time for all of us to watch the children practice gentleness while holding the newly born chickens!



Learning Gentleness in Littleton

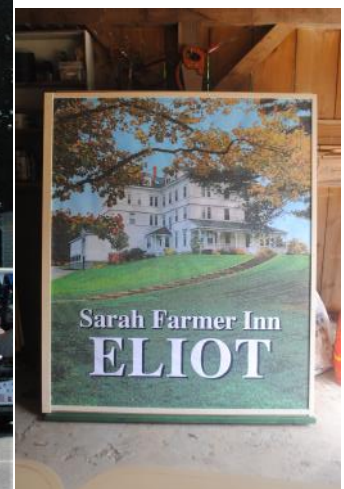


Maine on the March from Auburn to Lewiston

The Baha'is in Maine joined forces to participate in the State of Maine Bicentennial Parade on Saturday, August 21, 2021. Stretching from Auburn to Lewiston, ME, an estimated 15,000 viewers attended live while many more saw the event on TV. With a wonderful spirit of collaboration, the friends worked hard for several months to design a beautiful float honoring the establishment of Green Acre in Maine. They attended to every detail, combining creativity with a standard of excellence, while at the same time involving everyone in having a part to play in the creation of the display and preparation for teaching opportunities, all of this while making sure that they remained coherent with the elements

of the Plan and all of this during the challenges of the pandemic when there was uncertainty about whether or not the parade would actually happen.

We are happy to share with you here some of the photos that captured the essence of the day. You will see the happy faces of the marchers, most of them Baha'is from Maine, but also a few from Massachusetts, when, assisted by the Regional Baha'i Council, a call was put out for help from neighboring states. You will also see the awesome float that they constructed and be amazed at what a small group of dedicated friends was able to accomplish.





Celebrating with Joy in Litchfield, CT

The Baha'is and friends of the Faith from the Torrington community in the Litchfield cluster who completed Book 1 and their tutor as well as their Auxiliary Board member and the Secretary of the Regional Baha'i Council gathered on Sunday, September 19 at Burr Pond State Park in Torrington, CT to celebrate their accomplishment. With an abundant and delicious barbecue, lots of fellowship, a generous gift of specially decorated pumpkins for the occasion, and scenery that sparkled and delighted all, the participants summed up the sections of the Book and what they had learned, shared prayers, and voiced their enthusiasm about moving into Book 2. What a glorious day it was! What a beautiful celebration of love and joy!



Attracting the Youngest Hearts in Providence, RI

I would like to share an idea which comes from my experience in reading the Tender Years series of prayers to my grandchild, starting at 9 months. What originally gave me the idea of reading prayers to Ezra at such a young age was watching and listening to our Auxiliary Board member's 3 year old son. He was sitting with a group of much older children at a Regional Baha'i Council cluster meeting in MA. All of a sudden, he started reciting a very long prayer !! I was astonished and turned to the person who was sitting next to me, saying, 'Can you believe that child is reciting that prayer??!!' He

responded, 'Oh, that's my son. I guess it's because he hears prayers all the time'.

I am wondering if our Baha'i community could pay more attention to or offer guidance to first time parents for their very young children. I read three of the Tender Years books (all that were available at the time) to Ezra from 12 months until he was 23 months 5 days a week. I read these to him during the day along with singing to him the first Hidden Word (tune in Ruhi Book 3) when I would put him down for his nap. I did not have regular contact with him from that time until 2 weeks ago when my

daughter moved back to Providence for her postdoc. Both she and her husband are now working full time. I read all 6 books to Ezra, 5 days a week before his nap. I also sing them to him with made up tunes along with the first Hidden Word.

I wasn't sure he would remember the books or be interested in them. I have been VERY surprised. He still loves them and wants to hear them more than once. He asks for the 'radiant' light song to be sung more than once. I can only surmise that his heart is being attracted to the words of Baha'u'llah.

Being Together and Reaching Out in Scranton, PA

The friends in the Scranton cluster, with the accompaniment of others, spent a wonderful day together and reaching out to others in conversation. Participants gathered for a photographic memory of a day well-spent.



Commemorating Peace with the Arts and Devotions in Litchfield, CT

On Sunday, September 12, 2021, the Baha'is of New Hartford, CT (Litchfield cluster) held an "Afternoon of the Arts" devotional to commemorate the United Nations Day of Peace (World Peace Day). Twenty-two people (8 Baha'is and 14 friends) attended the event which was held outside in an "open mike" format. Artists offered music, dance, and poetry with the themes of peace, unity, and spiritual uplift.

Kathy Tomarelli shared the 2021 theme for World Peace Day "Recovering better for an equitable and sustainable world" and read the accompanying statement from the United Nations. She also shared the Baha'i principle concerning the oneness of humankind and the teaching that "the earth is one country and mankind its citizens."





Commemorating Peace with the Arts and Devotions in Litchfield, CT


**Regional Bahá'í Council
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Members of the Regional Bahá'í Council of the Northeastern States, 2020

Top to bottom; left to right:

Top row: Marie McNair, Vickie Nizin, Joel Nizin, Carey Corea

Middle row: Tabassom Anvari, Nader Anvari, Nina Dini

Bottom row: Frank Robinson, Michael Penn



Website:
<https://rbcnortheast.org/>