

# COMMITTEES & DEPARTMENTS

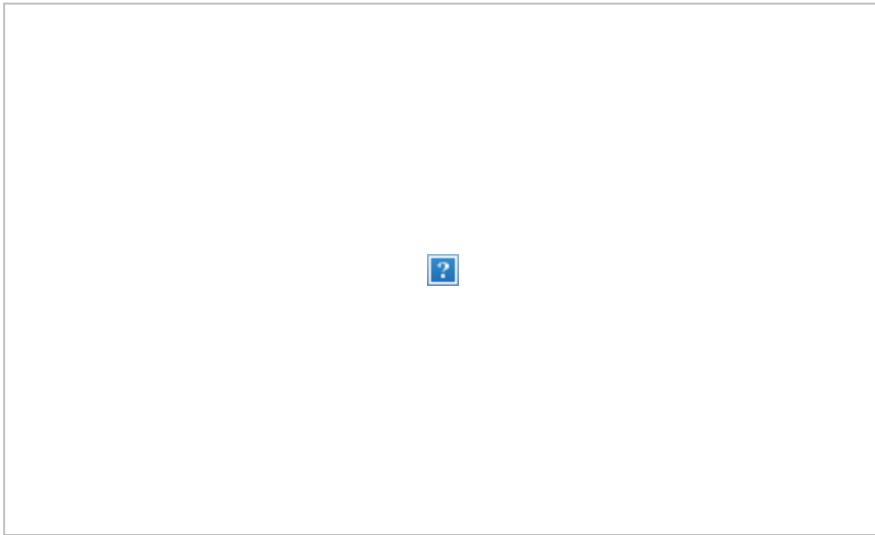
## Venues Committee

### National Conference 2000

Meeting the requirements of disabled people is an important aspect of the Venues Committee's work. People with disabilities are asked to advise us in advance of any special needs. It is the goal of the Committee to meet their needs and we will make every effort to do so, however due to circumstances beyond our control it is not always possible. Please contact: Bob Watkins, Secretary, Venues Committee, Tel: 01803 863454 e-mail: <mailto:watkins@rmewatkins.freemove.co.uk>

## Year of Service Desk

Tel/fax: 01704 551514. Esmyr Koomen, Tel: 01865 407887 e-mail: <mailto:yosdesk@koomen.demon.co.uk> <http://www.bahai.org.uk/yos>



Abigail Manvell from Isle of Skye (centre, holding child) with fellow volunteers in Swaziland. Photo supplied by Vafa Teghavi of West Oxfordshire (far right).

## From Skye to Swaziland

Sawubona! Greetings from Swaziland! Here is just a fill-in on what life is like in Africa. School starts really early, about 8am. Every day begins with an assembly, after which the children go to class. My work involves art classes, library time, and remedial help. With art, we do all sorts of things, from telling stories for the children to illustrate, asking them to draw themselves as they will be in 40 years time, to painting. In the future we hope to integrate music with these lessons.

At library time the children change their books. There are a lot of books here, even stories about those Loch Ness characters, The Family Ness, and about the Celts. They have Bahá'í story books and prayer books and these are quite popular. The library work involves keeping records of what books the children are taking out and

returning.

Remedial work involves me taking a group of children and going over their work with them to make sure they understand it. The other volunteers do sports with all the pre-school, primary school and high school children, so they are taken up with that.

School finishes at 1.15pm, so then I move on to the office where I help the secretary. Almost everything here is done by hand. It is very time consuming, but they have to write out who pays school fees and who doesn't etc. (All the schools here have fees, whether private or not.) The High School has been equipped with 57 computers from the Mona foundation, a charity in America. There are pictures of the school on the Web site.

During the holidays there are going to be lots of teaching opportunities, which I am really looking forward to. Communities with new local Spiritual Assemblies need to be deepened on their role and importance. There are some communities where the people think that the Bahá'í Faith is a sect of Christianity plenty of work for the Teaching Committee.

The rural communities are wonderful, and they really want children's classes, but no-one is able to be trained, so we hope to help them out. And there is also a trip to Mozambique!

Life is so fulfilling out here. Every day we are doing something. Apart from helping at the school there are dance workshops and youth deepening sessions.

Well, that's a day in the life of a Bahá'í volunteer in Swaziland.

Abigail Manvell Adapted from an item in "The Scottish Bahá'í Newsletter, no 20"

## **A Year of Service at Felin Gelli rural training farm**

Coming to Wales after seeing my friends go off to foreign and exotic locations seemed a little lame. After all, farming in the rain doesn't really compare to teaching in the tropics, does it? But when I thought about it, there are the same trials in any year of service post. I've had to suffer hardships (mucking out the chickens), learn new skills (milking the cow), overcome my fears (of Nancy, an enormous pig) and become detached (from having long nails).

### Helping adults with learning difficulties

Felin Gelli is a Bahá'í social and economic development project which aims to teach adults with learning difficulties about agriculture and horticulture, as well as helping them with literacy, numeracy and social skills. Being a volunteer means working with the students on a day to day basis, assisting them with the various tasks that constitute running the farm and market garden. As a result, services to the community are twofold a provider of training, and a source of produce, as eggs and vegetables are sold locally. Volunteers live on site in a wonderful little caravan far enough to have space if you need it, and close enough to be a part of the family, which I always felt I was.

I was initially nervous about working with people with learning difficulties, but their enthusiasm for any task (even clearing muck) overshadowed everything else. Admittedly it was frustrating when seedlings got buried rather than planted, or when I asked for a hoe and got a trowel, but provided you have patience and can laugh it off, everything works out. You have to remember that you are working with people who suffer as a result of prejudice on a massive scale. Holding that in my thoughts improved my patience no end. As Bahá'ís we have a duty to be the "helpers of every victim of oppression, the patrons of the disadvantaged". (1)

### Longing for a bit of retail therapy

I can't paint a picture of paradise. Being a veggie and looking after pigs and lambs that are soon to go to slaughter has been particularly difficult. There were times when I longed to trade my wellies for a pair of heels and a couple of hours of retail therapy. It's sometimes cold, muddy, smelly work, miles from anything resembling civilisation. I've always been a townie, so I thought I would have a terrible time adjusting to life in the countryside, but it wasn't nearly as bad as I imagined. After being woken up a few times by the hens or the dogs, it was fine.

Truthfully, I've had to get up much earlier when I was living in towns in order to travel from place to place.

I have been quite lucky in my timing - spending the summer here has been wonderful. Although farmwork is tough sometimes, and the weather isn't always kind, being outdoors every day has to be one of the best things about coming here. The amount of wildlife around Felin Gelli is astounding - from the resident swallows to the amazing variety of plant life. To be outside weeding the gardens and look up to see a pair of buzzards circling above is an unforgettable experience.

I loved being outside with nature, which for me was a very healing experience. I loved doing something different every day. I loved the way you can watch your work growing and literally harvest the fruits of your labours. I loved being a part of a project that is always moving forwards. Bahá'u'lláh said that "special regard must be paid to agriculture" (2) and 'Abdu'l-Bahá said that "economic problems should be first solved with the farmer". (3) Indeed, if we do not have sound principles and efficient systems at this most basic and essential level, what hope can we have for the higher levels of the New World Order?

Finding myself among the bean rows

So, why do people often dismiss doing service in their home country? "Service is the magnet which draws the Divine Confirmations" (4) - no matter what it is. I guess on any year of service post you find out about yourself. I found myself among the bean rows and in the pig pens, by the vegetable beds and in the hayfields. And I can't think of a better place where I could have done that and served in such a unique way.

Sorrel Ault

If you are interested in finding out more about Felin Gelli contact the YOS desk

References:

1. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
2. Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of the World
3. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, extract from a Tablet to an individual, 4/10/1912
4. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, Living the Life, p18

## The Juggle One-Day Conference in Leicester

Juggling family life and work is a constant challenge facing women today. Balancing the concerns of mother, wife, daughter or friend with those of carer, worker, voluntary helper, student, entrepreneur or executive throughout life is an increasing dilemma for all women.

This conference highlights some key factors of this dilemma with speakers and experts. Voluntary bodies, women's organisations, business, educational establishments and the public sector will all be participating in this not-to-be-missed event.

Contact Zarin Hainsworth-Fadaei, Tel: 01256 350187.

## Committee for International Pioneering and Travel Teaching

CIPTT Thelma Batchelor, Tel: 01372 375782, e-mail: [batchelor@clara.net](mailto:batchelor@clara.net) Barbara Winner, Tel: 01162 730181, e-mail: [mailto:winners@zetnet.co.uk](mailto:mailto:winners@zetnet.co.uk)

## Botswana is calling

"When the masses of mankind are awakened and enter the Faith of God, a new process is set in motion and the growth of a new civilisation begins." Universal House of Justice

Would you like to do "the most meritorious of all deeds"? Would you like to promote the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh? Would you like to come to Africa?

If so the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Botswana would like to invite energetic, motivated, self-sacrificing and preferably self-sufficient individual Bahá'ís to teach in Botswana. Accommodation and transport will be provided.

Botswana is a small country situated in the southern hemisphere of Africa, approximately 450 kilometres from Johannesburg in South Africa, with an approximate population of nearly one and a half million people. It is a peaceful and relatively hot, English speaking country.

For information please contact: Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Botswana, PO Box 466 Gaborone, Botswana  
Tel: (+267) 352532, Fax: (+267) 304504 e-mail: [mailto:cyrus@global.bw](mailto:mailto:cyrus@global.bw)

## **Latvia needs support**

Ten Local Spiritual Assemblies need to be established before registration of the National Spiritual Assembly of Latvia can take place. The expansion work is shaped to maximise the involvement of different communities and individuals, but this involvement is greatly enhanced by the presence of pioneers who can provide structure to the process.

The overall administrative capacity in the country is limited, with few people covering multiple tasks. The implication of this is three-fold -

the development of human resources will continue additional administrative capacity in the form of pioneers will be helpful pioneers and travel teachers should not have too high expectations as to what can be planned, prepared and arranged for them, although local meetings can always be arranged at short notice and accommodation is not a problem.

For further information please contact the CIPTT - Rouhieh Afnan, e-mail: [mailto:roohieh@aol.com](mailto:mailto:roohieh@aol.com)

## **The Virgin Islands await**

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Virgin Islands has set a goal that two travel teachers visit the British Virgin Islands during the Twelve Month Plan. We are writing to ask your assistance in helping us fill this goal.

The British Virgin Islands are made up of four main islands ... Tortola, Virgin Gorda, Jost Van Dyke, and Anegada. Total population on all islands is approximately 18,000, with the majority of individuals residing on Tortola. There are currently only two full-time pioneers serving in the British Virgin Islands and they live on the island of Tortola. One of the pioneers is a ship's mate and is at sea six days per week. A pioneer couple from Canada spends each winter on Tortola. Although there are Bahá'ís on the rolls of each island there are no functioning communities as most of the individuals are inactive.

Ideally, individuals who respond to this call should have the willingness to serve under the direction the National Spiritual Assembly while at the same time being able to function somewhat independently given the few active believers in the British Virgin Islands and the fact that there is no specific teaching project taking place. Individuals of African or Caribbean descent are preferred. Unfortunately, due to the smallness of the Bahá'í community we cannot offer accommodation with the friends.

The islands and weather are beautiful year round and the British Virgin Islands are a prized destination for vacationers, yet one that is not as commercialised as some of the more popular resort islands. This may appeal to someone who wishes to combine a vacation with a travel teaching trip.

For more information please contact Cathy Von Gonten, Secretary, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Virgin Islands, e-mail: [mailto:nsavi@islands.vi](mailto:mailto:nsavi@islands.vi)

**Hey YOUth ! Thinking about a Year of Service? Start planning, start saving. Start with a call or an e-mail to YOSDesk!**

# Children's Bahá'í Education Service

## Regional teacher training days

The CBES is delighted to announce five regional teacher training days in September/October. This is a fantastic training opportunity for anyone who is interested in working with children. Contact Mitali, Tel: 01223 573873.

## Spiritual education - the challenge ahead

At Ridván 2000 the Universal House of Justice's message 157 BE clearly spelled out a particular challenge to be faced: "Our children need to be nourished spiritually and to be integrated into the life of the Cause. They should not be left to drift in a world so laden with moral dangers." The potential damage to children from a decaying moral order defies estimation and the message states that "this realisation should spur us all to urgent and sustained effort in the interest of children and the future."

It is quite clear therefore that "spiritual education of children and junior youth is of paramount importance to the further progress of the community." The message points out that "although providing spiritual and academic education for children is essential, this represents only a part of what must go into developing their characters and shaping their personalities." There is a special emphasis on the role of individuals, institutions, the community as a whole and particularly parents to arise to meet this challenge.

How, then, can members of the UK Bahá'í community address these pressing needs? What urgent and sustained effort can we make? The Children's Bahá'í Education Service (CBES) wish to draw the friends' attention to how the National Bahá'í Curriculum addresses these very issues. The three attainment targets in the curriculum have been set out after careful consideration of the question "What kind of adults do we want our children to be?" They address the essentials of a Bahá'í education system - a system that should not only produce spiritually mature adults who are dedicated to the Cause but should also serve to protect and guide them through their childhood.

The attainment targets are:

The acquisition of a spiritual and moral character devoted to sacrifice and service. The acquisition of knowledge and understanding of the laws, teachings, history and key figures, covenant, administration and Sacred Scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith and other divinely revealed religions. The acquisition of skills appropriate to the individual, family, social and administrative life of a Bahá'í.

The framework for a systematic approach to the education and moral development of our children and junior youth is already available to us, therefore, and can be achieved by following the National Bahá'í Curriculum.

Every individual, whether a teacher in a classroom, or in a less formal setting, whether at a national or regional meeting, or a parent at home who follows the curriculum can be confident that they will be meeting the spiritual and moral needs of the child. It also provides an excellent way to ensure that we are responding to the call from the Universal House of Justice to spiritually nurture the children "and integrate them into the life of the Cause".

The National Bahá'í Curriculum "Waiting Upon The Blessed Beauty" costs £3.50 including postage and packing. To obtain a copy please send a cheque or postal order made payable to "The NSA of the Bahá'ís of the UK" to: CBES, 65 Stoneleigh Park Road, Stoneleigh, Surrey KT19 0QX

## A big "Thank you" to all the teachers

The Children's Bahá'í Education Service (CBES) would like to thank all those who helped at the children's classes for the recent Council for England regional gatherings.

In Coventry the children were in the expert hands of Lindsey and Barry Thorne. The children's activities are very difficult to arrange at these events as it is impossible to know how many and what ages will turn up. But Lindsey and Barry were well prepared with boxes and boxes of resources to cover every eventuality. In the end there was rather a small group with a wide age range.

A large part of the day was spent on a "challenge". Using the Council's theme for the 12 Month Plan of "a bridge between times" two teams had to build a bridge from the chairs on one side of the room to the tables on the other. The construction needed to be strong enough to run a remote control car over it. The only materials available were newspaper and sellotape!

By lunch time things were really hotting up and Lindsey's suggestion that they could ask their parents for help elicited whoops of joy from two boys whose father is an engineer.

The main room consultation in the afternoon was disturbed by the children's cheers as they each took turns to drive the car over the bridges. They then joined the adults to share some African songs they had learned and put a few on the spot with a "Who wants to win a couple of sweets?" quiz. The enthusiasm and excitement generated was incredible. Some had arrived with that rather sullen look of children who would rather be playing with their friends at home, but that was very soon dispelled and before long they wanted to know when the next event was!

The CBES extends grateful thanks to everyone who works tirelessly at children's classes locally, regionally and nationally.