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My experience of the youth training project

IF SOMEONE would had told me six months ago that I would spend a vast majority of my summer holidays living in a house in Hackney with relative strangers and completing Ruhi Books Two, Three and Four, I would have thought that they were completely mad! I always knew that the summer after my GCSEs would be a special one, but nothing could have possibly prepared me for this amazing, this life altering experience.



[Some of the youth at the training project in Hackney](#)

I remember hearing about the campaign during a Nineteen Day Feast a few months before it was due to begin. At the time I was swamped with exams and couldn't think about doing anything else besides relaxing once they were over. So I simply considered the announcement as yet another one of those Bahá'í things that I really couldn't be bothered to go to. But things soon changed. For some reason, which to this day I am still not sure of, the idea of going really stuck in my head and soon it was all I could think about. I talked it over with parents and it ultimately came down to two options: I could go to Hackney for two weeks, complete Book Two, and come back home or I could stay at home, sit in front of the TV and generally do nothing for two weeks. Something inside was telling me that the second option was not what this summer was for. A certain phase in my life was coming to a close and this was the time for me to really start thinking for myself, to start acting responsibly and most importantly to start seizing any opportunities that came my way. I knew that it was now or never.

My expectations at this point were simply to go there for a couple of weeks, to complete Book Two, to have some fun meet some people and then to come home to continue with the rest of my summer. Little did I know what lay ahead.

I remember walking into the room on the first day and feeling, firstly very embarrassed because I was late, and then just confused as to why I was there. I just kept thinking to myself... I don't do things like this, I don't go to Bahá'í events, I don't participate in things like this, I don't go and live in strangers' houses for two weeks. This isn't me. What am I doing here? And then I remember just looking around the room at everyone and all that doubt and anxiety just vanished. The energy of love and happiness I felt at that moment was like nothing I've ever experienced before and it was at that point that I just knew that I had made the right decision by being there and that this was what I was meant to be doing.

The next two weeks flew by as we worked our way through Book Two – Arising to Serve and I was just amazed at how close the group became we became a family within the space of a few days. At times things were hard and I think each and every one of us felt the intensity of it all – of living together eating together studying together shopping together

... sharing rooms, sharing bathrooms.... Everything we did was intensified. However I now regard these people as not only friends but my soul mates and the bonds that were made were only strengthened through tests and difficulties: both individually and as a group. Those first few weeks were probably the most amazing of my whole life. I met and fell in love with some of the most sensational people with whom I shared laughter, tears, experiences, emotions, more laughter, oh, and just a few water fights.

As well as this, my love for the Faith and for Bahá'u'lláh grew immensely. Each and every day I learned something new and with the help of others my understanding grew by the minute. All of a sudden I was filled with such love and admiration for the Faith, such as I had never felt before, that I couldn't bear to leave. So I didn't.

As Book Three came around, it brought with it new people and new challenges. At this point I was missing my family and my friends and finding it difficult to deal with such a large group and the slower pace. But I was determined to see it through. The lessons I learnt during Book Three were not obvious at the time but are now ones that I will never forget and use everyday. I learnt the necessity of encouraging others, of being patient and most importantly of recognising that each of us is endowed with talents and the potential to achieve excellence.

I won't go into the events that led to me deciding to stay for Book Four, but I thank God every day for allowing me to do so. Without exaggeration Book Four changed my life and just allowed everything to fall into place. I was surrounded by such beautiful people who had the most amazing knowledge of the faith that they filled me with a hunger to learn more.

As I look back over my time in Hackney I can't help but smile. I feel so blessed that I was able to be a part of this campaign and to have shared it with some truly outstanding people. Each and every person that I met is now a part of me and the amazing experiences we shared together are just too numerous to recount. I feel that those five weeks made so many things clear for me and as I come away from it all I can now realise the sheer importance of these Study Circles and just how influential they can become. Before this I was someone that went to Feasts and Sunday School but didn't really have any great love or passion for the Faith: it was something that I grew up with and really took for granted. But through doing this sequence of books the Faith is now the centre of everything that I do and I am so grateful to everyone who organised it for giving me this opportunity.

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