

Introduction - Dan Scott Transcript

Click here to view the video:

<http://transformingneighbourhoods.com/node/51>

Hello my name is Dan Scott and I'm with the Baha'i Community of Canada. And for the past few years I have been working with small groups of individuals across the country, to learn about elevating communities.

When we talk about elevating a community, I think what we mean is endowing the community with a sense of mission, in which all the members, as diverse as they may be, work together in a common purpose: to promote the welfare and the well being of its membership, as well as those beyond its own borders. In which everyone works tirelessly in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress.

Practically speaking, much of the work now focuses on what we can call "four core activities": children's classes, junior youth groups, devotional gatherings and study circles.

Much attention needs to be paid to the spiritual, moral and intellectual development of children. Children are future of every community. A cultivation of virtues and the development of sound character then in the heart and mind of the child is the focus of children's classes. Yet this is a deceptively simple statement because in a world that is becoming increasingly more complex, increasingly more globalized and more integrated in which problems and opportunities undreamt of in the past are presenting themselves. The way in which these virtues are expressed in different situations, also become more complex.

And then there is Junior Youth Groups. The experience in working in communities has shown that this age group of say about 12 to 15, is a special group with special needs. A lot of changes are occurring in the life of an individual at this age and creative attention needs to be devoted to providing programs of activity that engages their interest, mold their talents and their capacities for service.

Another one of these core activities is a Devotional Gathering. In a devotional gathering, the members of a community come together to pray, to read writings and to engage into spiritual conversation, conversation that is eminently or pre-eminently about spiritual matters: about the life of the soul, about the powers of the soul, about imagination, about intuition, about questions about justice, the expression of justice within the community. All of course with this view of promoting unity which itself is a spiritual concept and the

goal towards which –in a certain respect- the goal towards which civilization is advancing.

Finally we have what is called a Study Circle and in a study circle, members of a community, a small number of members of a community –usually 5 or 10- come together for a period of weeks to study certain courses, that assist them to develop skills and abilities, and to learn certain concepts, to enable them to carry forward specific acts of service that help a community to advance. For example, one course –or in fact a set of courses- focuses on working with children and another set of courses focuses on helping individuals learn how to become better animators in working with the junior youth. In this way a study circle becomes a very important component in which members of the community learn how to serve the community, how to help that community to advance. But the courses themselves reflect the learning of that community. As that community strives to advance, as it learns how to work with children more effectively, that learning becomes incorporated into subsequent courses.

At the heart of all of this work, is a fundamental belief that every human being has a right to contribute to the wellbeing of their community, to its material and spiritual progress and prosperity.