

Alberta Service Corps . . .



. . . meaningful involvement

By ELAINE VERBICKY

A dollar a day. Not such a great living wage.

An unpainted log shack, no running water, kerosene lamps and a swamp at your front door. Kind of an unbelievable setting for a university student's summer job.

But that's how Bryan Watt, Warren Larson, and John Reid, all arts 2, spent the summer. At Fort Chipewyan—Fort Chip for short—400 miles north of Edmonton they lived in the middle of an Indian-Metis community and taught pre-schoolers what pencils look like and what books are for.

Bryan, Warren and John were three of 21 university students who made up a nebulous entity called the Alberta Service Corps. Brainchild of the new provincial department of youth, the Corps gave Alberta students a chance to live a new kind of reality. The summer places they lived in were far away in more than one sense from the high, heated halls of their universities or schools.

"We set up the Alberta Service Corps to provide meaningful involvement with people for students during the summer time," says corps director Don Hamilton, known as "The Great White Father" to ASC people. "They could utilize their ability and energy in such situations to help a variety of communities, some of them economically depressed."

The service corps people did get involved with people—so much involved they are still getting over the

shock of coming back to the university world.

But what did everyone get out of a summer of disorientation, hard work, disappointments and the occasional warm success in communication?

Perhaps it's too soon to ask them. Perhaps it will take the vantage point of years before they can tell what they have left inside because of this past summer. But all agree they wouldn't exchange their experiences for anything.

Everyone remembers different little things that mean a lot. . . .

KIKINO

Eileen Dribb, theology 3, more often referred to as just plain "Dribb", remembers very clearly "the white fences" she and Pegg Yeland, Mt. Royal College Calgary, saw as they first drove into the Indian-Metis settlement 26 miles south of Lac la Biche.

So what's great about white fences? Says Dribb, "My first impression was 'Good grief, white painted fences!'. I thought we were walking into nothing. But there was a store right there.

"The first shock was that Kikino was all so spread out.

"And our first contact was with a lot of little kids. They came swarming all over us when we got out of the car."

Prepared for a dusty, grey clump of hovels, the girls found a small village, sunshine, and reasonably happy people.

First worry was where to sleep, but a Metis family offered them a

room right away. Worry gone; contact with a family made.

The husband-wife teaching team who had driven the girls up, found their accommodation was not quite ready, and had to move into the large, echoing church hall.

"We arrived on a Wednesday night," Dribb remembers, "and Ken and Judy moved into the hall with all the cobwebs. Pegg and I had supper there—corned beef and cabbage, cooked on a little hot plate. We felt lost in the place.

"We decided to start the play school a week from that night. Visiting the homes, talking to the mothers about the school, and getting registrations would take about a week, we thought.

"But the next morning, about eight o'clock, there was a little kid on the doorstep, ready to go to school.

"Word got around fast."

From the middle of May until the end of June, Dribb and Pegg helped with the playschool. Summertime was more unstructured. As Dribb says, "We were still working with the younger ones in the community, swimming and organizing small sports.

"But is anyone justified in trying to organize something when everyone seems happy with things as they are?" About the middle of the summer. The Service Corps people really began to wonder why they were doing what they were, and what the heck was it they were doing. Dribb and Pegg were no exception.

Dribb began to finish her letters "I hope to hear how you are doing and what is new 'on the outside'."

But all through the difficult time, they were learning.

PONOKA

"They called us patients with keys," remembers Ruth McNaughton, ed 2. Ruth and Roseann Cherepanik, arts 3, were two on a service corps team of four girls and one man at the Ponoka hospital.

The service corps people didn't wear uniforms. They didn't follow any particular system of work. What they did was get to know the patients as people—and that meant going to the picnics and dances, taking some invalid patients for walks in the garden, playing bingo, and just talking.

"We did get to know people by their first names. The nursing staff don't—they're too busy," says Roseann.

"We weren't indispensable. We just had time to sit and talk. I learned how to roll cigarettes on Male 10. One man was a former soccer pro. I learned a lot about soccer."

The team took patients on picnics, helped set up a penny carnival, and worked in the occupational therapy department for awhile.

At dances, men would come up and ask the girls what ward they were from as they danced.

"You know, we forgot they were sick," says Roseann. The girls became quite close to some of their patients. The involvement made some experiences painful.