

Volunteers go overseas

CUSO, a major Canadian volunteer organization, has sent more than 8 000 workers overseas since its inception 21 years ago.

CUSO, formerly called Canadian University Students Overseas, is Canada's version of the United States Peace Corps and was set up in 1961 to co-ordinate the recruiting of volunteers in a number of Canadian universities.

During the 1960s, the organization focused on recent university graduates who were sent to the Third World to teach. But by the mid-1970s, the need for regular teachers in developing countries had lessened to the extent that only 50 per cent of CUSO volunteers now work in education.

Today's CUSO workers — there are now about 600 on contract in 34 countries — come from a variety of ages and backgrounds. They include plumbers and bricklayers as well as engineers and accountants.

Because every posting has a teaching element to it, each CUSO worker is expected to train a local person on the job wherever possible. In short, the CUSO worker is supposed to work himself out of a job.

A CUSO volunteer must be a Canadian citizen or landed immigrant and at least 20 years old. There is no upper age limit — the organization once posted a 79-year-old volunteer to Uganda. The average age of today's volunteer is 28, and the ratio of male to female placements has remained about equal throughout CUSO's history.

Candidates screened

Potential CUSO workers are carefully screened through a series of interviews. They must also provide references and satisfactory medical records. In addition, CUSO volunteers undergo intense orientation sessions to prepare them for the culture shock of living in a foreign society.

Most workers sign two-year contracts with CUSO and have the option of extending their postings. Of the 315 field workers whose contracts expired last year 44 extended their postings for a year or more.

Although CUSO is an independent, non-government organization, its operating costs are paid by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). In 1980-81, CUSO received about three-quarters of its \$12-million budget from CIDA.

Although its volunteers are paid salaries by the host governments of developing countries, it costs CUSO about \$10 000 a year to put a worker in the field. This covers administrative costs, travel, field staff supervision as well as orientation and language training.

CUSO is not the only major Canadian volunteer organization involved in Third World development programs. The World University Service of Canada, created in 1939, began posting volunteers to developing countries four years ago.

It now has about 400 workers in service in 11 African countries. Like CUSO, its workers are paid low wages by the host government, which provides just enough to cover living allowances. CIDA also funds this organization.

Unlike CUSO, most of its volunteers are recent university graduates. Because the organization had requests to fill 200 job postings in developing countries by September, it began a two-month recruiting drive across Canada in early January.

Eating out easier for the blind

Some Ottawa restaurants are providing menus for the visually impaired thanks to the efforts of a 20-year-old blind university student.

Mark Joly got the idea for Braille and large-print menus when he jokingly asked for a Braille menu while dining out with friends. To his surprise the restaurant manager took him seriously and apologized for not being able to supply one.

Joly decided to survey about 100 of Ottawa's nearly 1 000 blind persons and found 96 per cent were in favour of restaurants supplying special menus. Only 20 per cent said they now would go to a restaurant without a sighted person and 68 per cent said they would eat out more often if special menus were available.

"Many blind people are very shy and they don't want to trouble someone else to read the menu for them," said Joly, who like most legally blind persons has some vision but cannot decipher the small print on a menu in a dimly-lit restaurant.

With the help of a federal summer student employment grant to cover salaries and office expenses, Joly set up a city-wide project canvassing owners for 800 restaurants and supplying those interested with one Braille and one large-print menu.

The menus are provided for free although they cost about \$35 to produce.

Joly is requesting donations to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind and so far donations have surpassed expenses. He is also supplying participating restaurants with stickers picturing a white cane and stating: "Braille and large-print menus available here."

"I think it's a very exciting idea," said Bill Gordon, manager of Vines Wine Bar. "Mark has a great concept and I think many restaurants will pick up on it. I've already suggested he make a presentation to my associates in Windsor and Toronto."

Joly, who is enrolled in the commerce program at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario said he wants to try out his idea in that city next summer. He said this past summer's work could be considered a pilot project for a nationwide scheme.

Guide rates Canadian attractions

Victoria's resplendent Butchart Gardens and the picturesque fishing village of Percé on Quebec's Gaspé Peninsula are among popular Canadian tourist attractions given the maximum three-star rating in the new *Michelin Green Guide to Canada*.

The 240-page guide is published for Michelin Tires (Canada) Limited in both French and English. It took six years to prepare and is based on the work of two international teams which travelled across Canada.

Divided into regions

For practical reasons, the guide divides the country into seven regions: British Columbia, the Rockies and Yukon, the Prairies, Ontario, Quebec, the Maritime provinces, and Newfoundland and the Northwest Territories.

The regions of British Columbia and the Rockies and Yukon have been awarded the most three-star ratings because of the stunning landscape and natural beauty.

Three stars are awarded when the site is "worth the trip"; two stars when a place is "worth a detour" and one star when it is considered "interesting".

In the Rockies region, Lake Louise, Moraine Lake, the Icefields Parkway, Athabasca Glacier, Mount Edith Cavell and Maligne Lake all have three-star ratings.

The guide includes an introduction describing the climate, inhabitants, political administration and history of various regions.