

Back in the early sixties there was a kind of mystical feeling for volunteerism. Has this changed?

I think it's gone right out the window — volunteerism in the Kennedy concept, the concept of the middle class outsider coming in. We are shifting off now to where we are hiring people to work in their own area. It is not the middle class kid from the city who goes out to the people in the country or even to another city. It really is the guy on the spot doing something in his own area. I really feel this is the big thing for us here. I think it changes the whole nature of volunteerism. It also changes the Company — what is required of it. There is no mechanism that can train people — where people come in with zero competency but lots of potential — to train them up to the point where they can run their own show. This kind of unorthodox ladder for advancement is very important.

**What is the age level of your volunteers now?**

About twenty-two or twenty-three on an average. We had a very heavy concentration of younger people, younger than that. But as we're getting farther into the communities, getting community people, we've had to put on an age ceiling of thirty. One thing is training. We want to get people who have a fair amount of time left to get into things. Also we were beginning to take people off welfare rolls. We found being a volunteer gave them a fair amount of status, and coming off after two years they mostly reverted back to their own situation after having had their expectations raised. We simply weren't big enough to set up the mechanism to handle this transition. We sort of opted out. We simply can't hack that problem right now.

**Has the role of the volunteer shifted, whether he is from the community or not?**

Volunteers doing development work should not be in the front line. Their role is to help the people in the communities get up and stand on their own feet. Every time the volunteers stand up and talk for them they are being highly paternalistic. We are helping people organize their own direct services. We'll put a lawyer in but not to do direct law work — rather to find other resources, including other lawyers, in the community.

**How much are volunteers paid?**

We give them a flat \$270 a month. It's \$370 for a volunteer with a dependent — a child, not a wife.

**What are the prospects for the Company of Young Canadians?**

We're pretty much on trial, and we'll make or break it this year. The government has had enough trouble with us. We have to show that we have some serious competency, or they'll say to hell with us at the end of this budget.

[MR. CATMUR, OF CUSO]

**When did CUSO begin and what is it all about?**

It started in 1961, before the Peace Corps. We're basically different from the Peace Corps because (1) the governments we serve overseas pay the salaries of our people, and (2) we are a private non-profit corporation.

**Are the CUSO volunteers actual employees of the host governments?**

They are. Our volunteers are absolutely forbidden from participating in any political activity whatsoever. They have a job to do and they are the employees of the host government, and if the government doesn't like what they're doing they'll fire them. The volunteers serve two years and they can extend as long as they like. We have a fairly high rate of extension.

**What are your volunteers like: How old, what sex and what do they do?**

The average age now is about twenty-four. We still have some generalists, but we find it is increasingly hard to place them so we are going more and more toward specialists. Our largest group is in secondary education; the second largest professional health workers (doctors, nurses, technicians, and radiologists); followed by technical specialists; and finally agriculturists, foresters, fishery specialists and so forth. We have more requests than we could ever possibly fill, and we have gotten more applications this year than ever before. We have about sixty-five per cent men, but we have a lot of nurses — our health program is probably eighty-five per cent women.

**Are all of the volunteers young and single?**

No. We have thirty or forty married couples. We try always to place both husband and wife in working jobs. Only very rarely will we send a non-working spouse over. We have always had a smattering of older, retired people and they often prove to be our most valuable volunteers. We just lost one volunteer, an excellent man, in Thailand. He was killed — electrocuted — working on an incubator. He was a poultry husbandry specialist.

**You now have twelve hundred volunteers — are you expanding?**

We have tended not to get as big as the Peace Corps. One reason is that we don't like to have an enormous presence in any one country. We prefer to maintain a low profile, one of direct service to the needs of the country. Sometimes we have two people on a project, sometimes ten or fifteen in or around a capital city, but we tend to get away from these concentrations.

*This article is by Thomas Kelly, a writer who served two years as Director of National Affairs for VISTA. The questions have been shortened in this text.*