



THE BUSINESS OF VOLUNTEERING

CUSO INTERNATIONAL'S CORPORATE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

CUSO INTERNATIONAL SENDS VOLUNTEERS FROM CAREFULLY SELECTED NORTH AMERICAN CORPORATIONS. THE PROFESSIONALS PASS ON CORE BUSINESS SKILLS, AND HELP CONTRIBUTE TO A WORLD OF SOLUTIONS.

By sharing their professional skills, Cuso International volunteers pass on life-changing knowledge and expertise. They help build the 'social infrastructure' – the individual skills and organizational capacity – that is so important to any nation's future.

With more than 50 years of experience in development, Cuso International continues to explore innovations in volunteer-sending. One such initiative is the sending of volunteers from carefully selected North American corporations such as Scotiabank, Accenture, Randstad and Deloitte. These professionals exchange core business skills and help contribute to a world of solutions.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND GLOBAL CHANGE

Participating companies release their employees for an assignment with Cuso International, holding the jobs for them until they return from the posting. In return, corporations get employees with enhanced inter-cultural skills and a deeper awareness of what's going on in the world.

The business volunteer program is part of our commitment to support UN Millennium Development Goal Eight, which focuses on engaging the private sector to support international development and poverty reduction. Businesses and civil society groups both have a direct impact on the lives of many people, so programs such as ours help build common ground between the two sectors.

Our corporate partners are carefully chosen, and business practices must meet the standards and principles which guide Cuso International. These include respect and promotion of human rights and the dignity of all people, accountability, transparency and fairness.



VOLUNTEER PROFILE: CHRIS LITTLE - SCOTIABANK

A business advisor worked for peanuts in Guyana, helping set up sound accounting practices for a women's food venture.

Chris Little, an employee of Scotiabank in Toronto, volunteered in Guyana as a financial advisor with the 'Helping Hands' women's food company – the community-based business makes peanut products for the local market. He also supported a youth carpentry training workshop.

The work was challenging, Chris admits, because many of the workers lacked basic math and accounting skills, necessary to grow their business. The volunteer said he had to learn more patience, and to try different teaching styles.

"There are little successes every day, working with the women at the peanut factory, trying to cost out the products to see if they're going to make a profit. There were a lot of questions, and now they're starting to work on their own."

Chris found his time in Guyana very rewarding. People, he says, make all the difference. "What's great is the way people are a community there. They tend to help each other a lot. The ladies sell a lot of products from other people in the community because they want to help – you don't see that very often."

It was very different from the hustle and bustle of life as a banker back in Canada. "It's a great way to see a different way of life. It's a great opportunity to get a perspective on what life is like in other parts of the world. There are other ways of doing things. Just because we live in Canada doesn't mean ours is the only way. And just to be away from work for six months doing something completely different is really refreshing. You don't feel as tired as you do back home, even though there might be more challenges in everyday life."

VOLUNTEER PROFILE: HÉLÈNE PARADIS - RANDSTAD

A business administrator volunteers with an HIV/AIDS network based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Hélène Paradis, a branch manager for Randstad in Levi, Quebec, spent six weeks working as a business consultant for the Tanzanian AIDS Forum (TAF), a national network of 57 HIV/AIDS organizations that work in education, prevention or care for people who are HIV-positive.

Hélène is a corporate volunteer which means she came from an established business, in this case Randstad. The human resources corporation pays the volunteers a stipend in their absence and holds their jobs until they return from the Cuso International posting. It's an ideal way for working professionals to gain overseas experience in development without sacrificing job security at home.

Her job was to assess TAF's strategic plan and identify what was necessary to secure government funding. The needs were threefold: an activity plan, a budget, and a monitoring & evaluation plan.

Hélène also felt TAF would benefit from greater communication with members, so she introduced a simple English and Kiswahili newsletter emailed daily to members; it compiles the previous day's news and items of interest involving HIV/AIDS.

Almost immediately, members responded with enthusiasm and appreciation.



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– Hélène Paradis



“The workplace is different there. It’s not always as results-oriented. They don’t celebrate successes that much. People work for security. For many, it’s about bringing a paycheque home, which is understandable,” she says. “But I could see the difference even in four weeks, just how proud they were when they got members’ feedback. And I would say, ‘See how happy they are? Now it will be easier to get membership fees and new members, and it makes it easier to run the organization.’ When you link those things together, it makes a difference.”



VOLUNTEER PROFILE: ALAN MAN - DELOITTE CANADA

An accountant finds inspiration among Jamaica’s forgotten youth while volunteering with a dispute resolution organization.

Perhaps surprising for a chartered accountant from Toronto, Deloitte Canada employee Alan Man found himself at a youth gathering in Kingston, Jamaica, talking about that country’s more troublesome statistic: the third highest per capita murder rate in the world.

Many of Jamaica’s young people – jobless and uneducated – are drawn to the power and camaraderie of urban gangs where they become both perpetrators and victims of violence.

The meeting, attended by some 50 teenage girls and boys, helped Alan, a Cuso International volunteer, understand the kind of impact that a young, urban professional can have – even an accountant like himself.

He wasn’t counselling youth on healthy lifestyles or job searches, but he did help others do those things by making the organization they work for, Jamaica’s Dispute Resolution Foundation (DRF), viable and sustainable. The foundation is a civil society organization that supports and delivers alternative justice programs such as mediation and arbitration, as well as crime prevention outreach for Jamaican youth at risk.

“It was amazing seeing how involved, outspoken and passionate these young people were,” Alan says. “They often don’t have choices. They just hit the default and join a gang. This program gives them a chance for something different.”

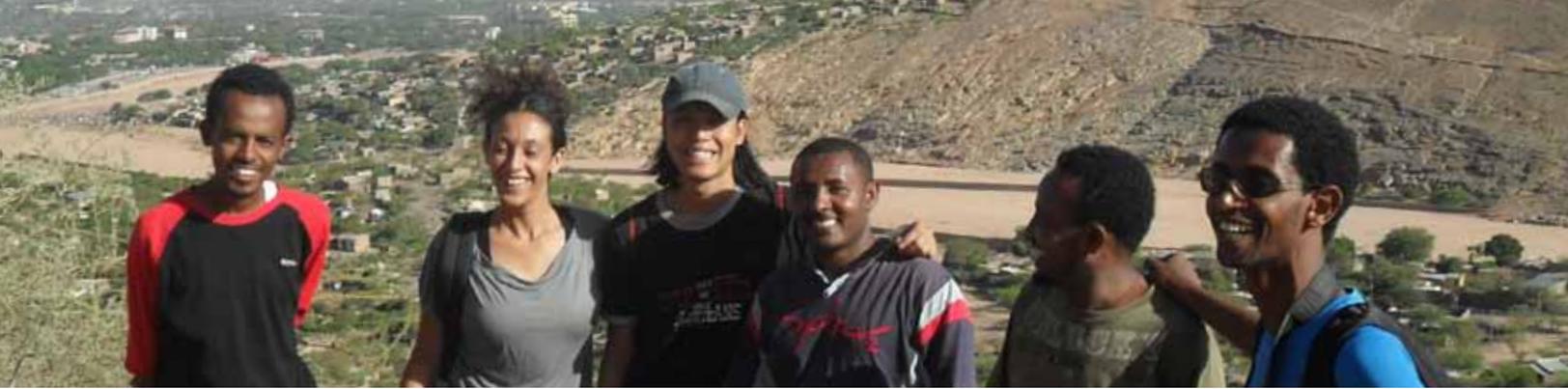
In the beginning, Alan was preoccupied with DRF’s accounting which was sound but had not been kept up-to-date. After clearing the backlog of transactions, Man helped the financial team – both staff and volunteers – create a sustainable system to keep the books current and then began to work on auditing and budgeting procedures and strategic planning. It’s the kind of things you’d expect a chartered accountant to do.

But Alan wanted to better understand all the services the DRF provided. That’s how he ended up at the youth outreach meeting.

“It was great to see and be part of this positive energy and drive for change in a community with such a stigma.”



“It was great to be part of this positive energy and drive for change in a community with such a stigma.” – Alan Man



VOLUNTEER PROFILE:

YARED AYELE - ACCENTURE

An I.T. specialist originally from Ethiopia returns to his country of birth to help get a fledgling university online.

Fourteen years after leaving dry, hot Ethiopia with his father for cool, wet Washington State, Accenture employee Yared Ayele returned to his homeland. The 26-year-old computer science graduate spent a year as a Cuso International volunteer installing a high-speed, wireless network from scratch at a fledgling university in Dire Dawa.

After graduating from the University of Washington, Seattle-based Yared had many job offers but chose Accenture specifically because of its Cuso International partnership, knowing he would be eligible to volunteer overseas after two years on the job.

Accenture is a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company with nearly 250,000 employees worldwide. They have been freeing up employees to volunteer with Cuso International and VSO (Cuso's strategic alliance partner, based in the U.K.) for 10 years.

Installing a sophisticated, integrated computer system and wireless network at a university still under construction, with scarce parts, little knowledge support and cumbersome red tape seemed, at the outset, an insurmountable challenge.

Forewarned about the hassles of doing business in Ethiopia, he simply treated the university as he would any other Accenture client with acute needs: he'd figure out solutions.

When Yared arrived at the six-year-old Dire Dawa University, with its 300 staff and 7,000 or so students, it had only one computer lab with about a dozen working computers and dial-up Internet. He hit the ground with a sprint and within six months, the network was up and running.

But there was no point in building a system no one would understand or be able to maintain, so he chose four young men who were operating the computer lab to become the university's official IT department.

"I wanted to make sure it's not just me doing the stuff and leaving," he says. "Knowledge transfer is a big part of our jobs as Cuso volunteers." Nurturing the budding IT team and watching the men develop pride and professionalism in their work was tremendously satisfying, he says.

Yared Ayele, far right, poses with friends during a hike in the hills above the city of Dire Dawa.

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ABOUT CUSO INTERNATIONAL

Cuso International is an international development organization that works through volunteers. We have over 50 years of experience promoting volunteering as a tool to fight global poverty and disadvantage. By supporting people who share their skills, creativity and learning with people and communities around the world, we are contributing to a movement of volunteers for the world. Visit www.cusointernational.org for more information.



Program undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)