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## EDITORIAL

International volunteering is a timely topic. This fact was emphasized in early April when I encountered four articles in a two-week period from publications which featured topics on Volunteer Vacations, Alumnae making a difference internationally, “Voluntouring” and the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign of the Stephen Lewis Foundation. In addition, Canada AM ran a segment about the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign. Indeed, international volunteering is a hot topic.

In this issue, there is a mix between the logistics of international volunteering and the heart-warming personal experiences of international volunteers. Sean Kelly and Robert Case report on the volunteering habits of international volunteers who have returned to Canada. In “Becoming a Global Citizen”, Patrick Lohier presents an overview of the Canadian agencies that provide international volunteer experiences. The “Peer Expert” question penned by Suzanne Montford and Mara Munro outlines the best practices for preparing Canadians for their first volunteer experience in the developing world.

From the perspective of an agency that provides international volunteer experiences, Theo Breedon describes two national volunteer programs in Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Alex Way outlines the challenges of being a youth volunteer with Project Help Lesotho, while John Graham discusses his volunteer adventure with his daughter, also in Lesotho. The book review by Hugo Bastidas provides us with an overview of the experiences of a Canadian physiotherapist volunteering in Bhutan.

We also chose in this issue to highlight Canada-based volunteering which provides support internationally by featuring the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign in an article by Arlena de Bruin about the CanGo Grannies of Kamloops, British Columbia.

As I write this editorial, the heads of state of the G8 are assembling in Germany to discuss topics of importance, including their commitment to the poorer countries of the world. Hopefully, the important and essential contribution of volunteers will be highlighted.

Joan Wyatt  
Editorial Team

## CANADIANS OVERSEAS, CANADIANS BACK HOME – VOLUNTEERISM WITHOUT BORDERS

by Sean Kelly and Robert Case

Canadians have a long history of volunteering beyond their borders. Since the early 1960s, approximately 65,000 Canadians have packed their skills into a suitcase and ventured overseas to work in international development.

A volunteer placement in the developing world can be profoundly affecting and even life changing for the individuals who serve abroad. But does the overseas experience spark the volunteer spirit – or was it there before these Canadians journeyed abroad?

Once home, do these Canadians volunteer more – having been bitten by the volunteer bug as well as the travel bug? Do they volunteer the same amount as they did before they went away? Or do they volunteer less, having “paid their dues” overseas? Do they contribute their time to global issues after they return, or do they re-focus on local concerns once they are back in their communities?

CUSO and the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services, with support from Imagine Canada, undertook a research project to assess the volunteer activity of Canadian overseas volunteers after they return home. To do this, we gathered information about the volunteer activities of returned Canadians during a 12-month snapshot in 2005. It is important to note that our research is not about CUSO or any specific organization. It is about what the experience of overseas volunteering has meant to these Canadians on their return home. CUSO, like other agencies that send volunteers abroad, is merely a conduit for gaining international experience.

We gathered data as follows:

- 1) A mail-out survey answered by 647 respondents who volunteered through CUSO, one of Canada’s oldest and largest international volunteer sending agencies. Many of these volunteers also served abroad on postings through other international non-profit organizations.
- 2) In-depth interviews with 40 of these survey respondents.

### Volunteer Activity in Canada

We found that two-thirds (67%) of our survey respondents had volunteered in the 12 months prior to our survey. This contrasts with the results of the 2004 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating (CSGVP), which in its one year snapshot found that 45% of all Canadians 15 years or older volunteered. The respondents in our survey also contributed an average of 241 volunteer hours per year, compared with 168 hours for Canadians reported in the CSGVP.

There is a “chicken and egg” question at the heart of our research. Did the Canadians in our survey go overseas because they were already active volunteers committed to nonprofit service or did service overseas awaken a desire to volunteer once back in Canada? Many of the returned volunteers we interviewed said they were already volunteering and committed to nonprofit service in Canada before they volunteered overseas. One interviewee summarized this perspective by noting:

“The kind of person that takes on a volunteer position overseas is naturally a volunteer.”

Interviewees commented, however, that their overseas experience reconfirmed their commitment to volunteering. One person said:

“At first, working in the context of a developing nation gave me an overwhelming sense that nothing one does will ever be enough to really make a difference. By the end of my stay, my perception was completely altered and I had accepted the fact that any volunteering one does, no matter how small it seems, is worthwhile.”

In our survey, 44% of respondents volunteered with three or more organizations on return to Canada, 85% volunteered for at least two and only 15% limited their volunteer activities to one organization. In the 2004 CSGVP, 50% of all volunteers limit their volunteering to one organization and only 22% volunteer for at least two. It seems that not only are returned volunteers more active in volunteering, but that they spread their activities over more organizations than do most Canadians who volunteer.

The most common choices of organizations to volunteer for were those that focused on:

- community development and poverty (24%);
- education, literacy and research (24%);
- arts and culture (23%);
- religious activities (21%);
- international and global issues (20%); and
- health care (20%).

We asked survey respondents if they had focused their volunteering on international issues, since returning from overseas. Perhaps surprisingly, 63% volunteered for organizations that focused mostly on Canadian issues, 29% volunteered for organizations that dealt with both Canadian and international issues and 7% volunteered for those focused solely on international issues.

Respondents indicated that the most common volunteer activities they engaged in were:

- serving as volunteer board or committee members (63%);
- organizing and supervisory activities (43%);
- fundraising (28%); and
- public education and advocacy (26%).

In summary, returned overseas volunteers seem to have a much higher volunteer rate than the general Canadian population. They also tend to volunteer for more organizations and for activities that require leadership, supervisory and management skills. Taking on such challenging volunteer positions is to be expected because, as one returned volunteer said of his overseas experience:

“It was a very quick maturing process where the development of my leadership and organization skills was constantly tested. In simple terms, I became a ‘can do guy’ for the causes I believe in.”

The full research report can be found at:

[http://www.cuso.org/\\_files/CUSO\\_OverseasExperience070111\\_E.pdf](http://www.cuso.org/_files/CUSO_OverseasExperience070111_E.pdf)

*Sean Kelly is a communications specialist with CUSO. He volunteered overseas with Canadian Crossroads in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and with CUSO in Thailand.*

*Robert Case is a Senior Researcher at the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services, in Kitchener, Ontario. He volunteered overseas with CUSO in Papua New Guinea.*

FRENCH TRANSLATION OF THIS ARTICLE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

## **VSO AND NATIONAL VOLUNTEERING: A VISIT TO NIGERIA AND SIERRA LEONE**

by Theo Breeden

For the last five years, VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) has been working with local organizations in over 25 developing countries to develop and strengthen local and national volunteering initiatives. We refer to this as “National Volunteering” to differentiate it from our international volunteer sending program, which recruits and sends volunteers overseas from Canada, Holland, India, Ireland, Kenya, the Philippines and the UK.

I recently had the pleasure of visiting our program offices in Nigeria and Sierra Leone. My visit was a chance to observe the amazing work of our partners and see how local and national volunteering is contributing to social development. I also had the chance to talk to VSO volunteers from across the organization’s recruitment bases who have experience in the voluntary sector

and are sharing their skills with our partners. Below are my reflections on local and national volunteering for social development, and VSO’s support for it, from two fascinating and diverse West African countries.

### **Nigeria**

Nigeria is an enthralling country with the largest population in Africa. Although rich in oil and other natural resources, over 90 million Nigerians out of 140 million are considered to live in poverty. After years of government neglect and widespread corruption, health and other sectors are suffering and many people lack access to appropriate health care and other essential services.

Over the last five years VSO has been supporting Fantsuam Foundation, a community-based organization in the Kafanchan region that works with women on micro-finance and livelihoods initiatives. More recently, VSO has been supporting Fantsuam Foundation to develop and implement a rural volunteering scheme called Gaiya, which is a local term meaning “free gift of labour”.

A marginalized region with a high prevalence of HIV and AIDS, Kafanchan has suffered from government mismanagement of the health care system, with the majority of medical centres lacking adequate supplies and qualified staff. As a result, Fantsuam Foundation has paired up with the local College of Nurses to offer training to nurses and midwives in reproductive health, early childhood health care and HIV counselling and prevention. This training enhances the formal training provided by the College and broadens the nurses’ and midwives’ expertise in HIV and AIDS prevention and other health care areas, better preparing them for the realities they will face in rural communities.

While visiting Kafanchan, I was able to meet with many of the nurses and midwives who had taken part in the Fantsuam Foundation training and talk with them about Gaiya. They were about to begin a six-month internship to practice their skills in the field, a requirement to become certified health care practitioners. I asked the nurses and midwives whether they really saw themselves as “volunteers”, as I saw them first and foremost as health care practitioners. Did they consider their rural practicum, which was required, as volunteering, even though the Gaiya training itself was voluntary?

Many of the nurses with whom I spoke explained it in this way. It was well known among the local population that Kafanchan had changed dramatically over the last twenty years and the health sector was, in their view, in a state of total disrepair.

Many social institutions were also suffering and the very notion of *Gaiya* – the fabric of community self-help and mutual support – had itself been negatively affected. To them *Gaiya* was a chance to acquire valuable healthcare skills and provide young mothers and their children with treatment that was of higher quality than what was currently available. They also had the opportunity to talk to mothers about the risk of HIV infection and how to then discuss this subject with their husbands. Their

interaction with rural women gave them a sense of purpose in making a difference to rural women's lives, and of those of their children, husbands and neighbours.

Also of significance was the feeling of camaraderie among the nurses and midwives having undergone the training together. Not only was *Gaiya* providing them the opportunity to acquire skills in HIV counselling which would greatly enhance their careers after they completed the practicum, they also saw *Gaiya* as part of something larger: of working together as a team in contributing to rural development in their country. They considered their volunteering as something they would cherish and continue to do throughout their lives. This, to them, was the very essence of *Gaiya*.

I also had the opportunity to speak with two VSO international volunteers who are supporting this initiative, a Ugandan HIV and AIDS specialist and a Canadian youth volunteer, both of whom have extensive voluntary sector experience from their respective countries. Stephen Batanda spoke of his experience in working with rural communities in Uganda to develop strategies in preventing HIV and AIDS. Hiromi Inokuchi, from Toronto, spoke of her work as a coordinator of volunteers for the Centre for Environment at the University of Toronto. They now work together and have developed, in collaboration with the College of Nurses and Fantsuam Foundation, a comprehensive training program that is responsive to the needs of rural women and their communities. This training is based on teamwork, up-to-date health care procedures and respect for rural women and their local reality.

### **Sierra Leone**

Sierra Leone has recently come to prominence in the West through the Hollywood film *Blood Diamond*. Although second from bottom on the UN Human Development Index, the country is vibrant and the people are warm and full of hope after suffering through a 10-year civil war which killed an estimated 50,000 people and disabled many more. However, the country has a long and rich tradition of volunteering and community support and the government is looking to build on this tradition to engage the country's large number of unemployed youth.

The purpose of my visit was to meet with the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), a government institution that is involved in a wide array of development initiatives across the country. This year, VSO will be working with NaCSA to implement its Peace and Development Corps program (PADCO), the aim of which is to create opportunities for educated, unemployed and under-employed graduates, with a focus on the inclusion of youth with disabilities and gender equity, to use their skills and energy in the service of national development.

Given the prolonged civil war and its devastating effect on the economy, many young Sierra Leoneans face an uncertain future in finding meaningful employment. A large number of people have left the country to start new lives elsewhere, while many others who have remained there dream of following in their footsteps. There is also a fear that if the present economic situation does not improve, tensions may again boil over. PADCO will provide extensive training to recent graduates in local governance and civic engagement, which is part of the country's move toward decentralization. These volunteers will then be placed in various district authorities throughout Sierra Leone to work with local officials around implementing the decentralization process.

The government hopes that after their year-long placements, the volunteers will be taken on as paid, full-time staff (which occurred with a similar project last year). Thus, the program will have achieved its objective in creating opportunities for young Sierra Leoneans to become leaders in their own right, involved in making important decisions at the local level for the betterment of the entire country.

Like Stephen and Hiromi in Nigeria, an international volunteer will have the opportunity to work alongside one of VSO's partners. Beginning in June Kate Press, a young woman from Ottawa with former experience as a volunteer for Rights and Democracy and Oxfam-Canada, will be the PADCO Coordinator of Volunteers, helping to ensure that the volunteers have an experience as enriching and educational as possible.

### **Reflections on volunteering**

My experiences in Nigeria and Sierra Leone have re-affirmed the important role of volunteering within our lives. Also, it has confirmed my view that people have many different reasons to volunteer: some to acquire new skills that will help them professionally in the future; others to give back to their community; and, for many, it is a combination of personal satisfaction and self-development, as well as the realization that volunteering is of benefit to all those within the community and society as a whole.

The young nurses and midwives from Nigeria were eager to take part in *Gaiya* as it afforded them a chance to learn new skills related to their profession. Coming together as a team gave them a sense of collective strength. Indeed, they had become more vocal to the college administration and local authorities about the plight of the health care system and of the hardships they faced on a daily basis working with the limited resources that were provided. For Hiromi, Stephen and Kate, their volunteer work will give them the much-needed overseas experience when they return home after their volunteering to hopefully find employment in the international development field, a profession which they greatly wish to be a part of. And for the PADCO volunteers, over the next month



they will be setting off from the capital, Freetown, to various districts in the hinterland for a year. There they will hone their skills as local officials and future leaders, contributing to the social development of post-conflict Sierra Leone.

*Theo Breedon is National Volunteering Development Officer at VSO Canada and works with VSO program offices in West Africa and Guyana to develop and strengthen local volunteering initiatives.*

If you are interested in learning more about how you can volunteer with VSO to support National Volunteering overseas, email us at [inquiry@vsocan.org](mailto:inquiry@vsocan.org) or visit our website at [www.vsocan.org/nationalvolunteering](http://www.vsocan.org/nationalvolunteering).

## PROJECT HELP LESOTHO

by Alex Way

Silence and a hurried sadness fall on this village as infinite fat flakes. I walk, accompanied by several students, up the corn field-covered slope that separates the school where I work from the mud-walled house where I stay. The village is gradually cut off by a descending wall of grey-white wetness from the company of nearby hills topped with clusters of thatch houses. Snow in this poverty evokes something different from the comforting, tingling numbness brought on by snow in Canada. For my escort, it means long, cold walks home to distant villages without enough clothes; for the many who subsist on the fields they tend it means a meagre harvest; for all those who sleep in huts warmed only by fire it means freezing nights and sick mornings. It is June 2006, and an unusually cold winter is approaching for those who live on the roof of Africa, in the mountain nation of Lesotho.

Lesotho has the dubious distinction of having the highest HIV prevalence rate of the 50 Least Developed Countries in the world.<sup>1</sup> Per capita income is two dollars per day.<sup>2</sup> One out of every three Basotho (the people of Lesotho) is HIV positive.<sup>3</sup> It is hard to argue with the fact that Lesotho is in dire straits. So I, a 21 year-old with a year of university under my belt and searching for some clarity of purpose in my life, find myself working as a volunteer affiliated with a small Canadian charity named Project Help Lesotho as part of a seven- month stint in Africa.

Having reached my house, I lend my toque, my jacket and a sweater to a few students who are particularly ill-equipped for the weather. I will not need the clothes for the night, and they still have a lengthy trudge ahead of them. One would think that in a place like Lesotho, opportunities to lend a helping hand like this one would be in abundance. But my experiences in Africa have led me to a more nuanced conclusion about the power and dangers of young people volunteering overseas.

I became quick friends with Thabo, a Grade 11 student at the school where I worked, when we discovered a shared love for jogging not long after my arrival in Lesotho. He found great pleasure in how quickly I lost my breath in the thin mountain air, so our runs (and breaks) provided ample time to make each others' acquaintance. Thabo had lost both parents (likely to AIDS) and was attending school on a rare needs-based scholarship away from his extended family (who appeared indifferent to his existence). It is obvious he is motivated by this scholastic opportunity: he works hard and does well. He is the sort of inspirational kid who greets you daily with a smile, no matter the circumstances. But he is obviously alone, and later I discover from another friend that his living stipend barely covers his food and he often eats only once a day. When I contemplated the injustice, a hard working kid, hungry and relatively alone, it seemed only natural to invite him to come have dinner with me regularly. It is a good thing I did not.

Fortuitously, I found myself in a conversation with a teacher about the importance of jealousy in organizing community interactions. I learned that in Lesotho, where avenues to achievement are so few that one person's success often means another's failure, people harbour an acute sense of who deserves what, and sanction those who surpass their prescribed position. Someone else's success, especially if they are less privileged, is implicitly understood as an offence: it means that my or my relatives' failure is not due purely to the unfavourable conditions all community members face, but to some degree is due to a personal failing. Sanctions against the less privileged who show signs of abnormal success include gossip that questions their moral standing, ridicule, the withdrawal of social supports and ostracism. Thabo was doubly vulnerable: not only was he underprivileged and therefore expected to perform poorly, but he was likely orphaned by a highly stigmatized disease, and thus his moral standing was liable to be questioned. To have a chance at moving past high school, Thabo had to keep a low profile, drawing little attention to his successes and his family situation, so that he could maintain what informal support he had and avoid the community's sanctions.

If I had invited Thabo to join me for dinner daily, it would have been rude, and thus difficult, for him to refuse – especially since I was working for the school and therefore deserving of respect. But as the one foreign visitor in the village, I was highly visible, and people would have noticed Thabo's frequent visits. Since it would appear Thabo was gaining disproportionate benefit from my presence compared to other students, people would come to question Thabo's motives in befriending me. Under closer scrutiny, Thabo's relative success in school would likely be interpreted as the product of his positioning himself to unfairly monopolize aid directed towards the community as a whole. His relationship with me would appear to be only the most obvious manifestation, but his

deservingness of other aid, such as his scholarship, might come under question by the community. In such a situation, the village would likely sanction what they saw as a breach of community norms and remove the informal supports provided to Thabo, further marginalizing him. My apparently straightforward short term solution would likely have circumscribed Thabo's long term opportunities.

These sorts of situations were common, and I cannot say I always navigated their intricacies successfully. I understood, even before departing, that my lack of language skills, cultural capital and technical knowledge limited my ability to make a significant positive impact, and that my primary goal should be to learn first and then act if possible. However, the sheer magnitude of need often overwhelmed these rational buffers to rash action. When arriving face-to-face with tragedy, we are driven by an all-powerful need to assuage our guilt with visible deeds. We desire to see the positive impacts of our presence, as if to separate ourselves from the processes that have created the injustice, to declare our allegiances to the marginal once and for all. I can only hope that my positive impact outweigh my blunders.

It is this drive towards rash action that makes young volunteers overseas a dangerous commodity. That is not to say we should throw up our hands and keep our youth sheltered in their comfortable western existence. Young people who are cautious, observant, and conceptualize their time overseas as part of a larger process should be encouraged and supported to go abroad. If they see their time overseas as providing them with resources to engage in activism and advocacy at home, where their influence is much greater, as well as providing them with the impetus to question the impacts of their chosen direction in life, they will likely benefit from the communities they visit in the long term. These young people will act as ambassadors, using their experiences and passion to shake people in Canada from their torpor, forcing them to see those who often suffer in obscurity. It is only through such changes that long term solutions to poverty and HIV can truly come about.

What is required for those who facilitate these excursions is to take extreme caution. Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) like Canada World Youth and Youth Challenge International face incentives that push them to address these concerns only marginally. Organizations are competing over young people willing to pay significant fees to participate in such projects, fees that pay staff salaries and allow an organization to grow. Though I do not question the honourable intentions of such NGO staff (many of whom I count as my friends), it appears the structure of today's system can skew these virtuous objectives. Projects are expanded before they are ready to accommodate more volunteers. Young people are accepted into these programs with the hope that they will achieve the above mentioned mentality while on project, rather than assuring that they hold it

already. Advertisement competes for interested customers by playing into the public's perception that good intentions and hard work are enough to have a positive impact while overseas, rather than striving to debunk this myth.

The result is, on occasion, a young volunteer who does not realize that the repercussions of their actions will be shouldered by the community long after the volunteer returns to their home. They fail to realize that Thabo's situation, though not ideal, is all he has. He cannot walk away from my decisions as I inevitably will.

I watch the snow flakes catch and melt on my black fleece jacket as the few students move away from my house and begin the long walk toward their homes. The storm steadily obscures their silhouettes, and soon they are invisible. Metaphorically, it is this that NGOs must strive to prevent: a blindness to the fact that life in these communities goes on long after it becomes invisible to volunteers. The frigid temperatures are not expected, and these students happen to be the ones I was tutoring after school. Closing the door, I feel confident my actions have been justified, and turn to make myself a cup of tea. Tomorrow, they will bring the clothes back to me, and I will remember to let Thabo know, discreetly, how highly I regard him and that I am here to help if he so requires.

*Alex Way attends the University of Toronto where he specializes in Peace and Conflict Studies. He is a graduate of Pearson United World College of the Pacific. In 2004-05, he acted as a Canadian Youth Representative to Environment Canada and the United Nations Environment Program. He has worked in Tanzania, Uganda and Lesotho, collaborating with local youth on HIV/AIDS initiatives on both prevention and care for those affected.*

Footnotes:

1. UNCTAD. "The Least Developed Countries Report, 2006". [ctad.org/en/docs/ldc2006p1ch2\\_en.pdf](http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/ldc2006p1ch2_en.pdf).

2. UNCTAD "Lesotho" [http://www.unctad.org/sections/ldc\\_dir/docs/ldcmisc20053\\_les\\_en.pdf](http://www.unctad.org/sections/ldc_dir/docs/ldcmisc20053_les_en.pdf).

3. UNCTAD. "The Least Developed Countries Report, 2006". [http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/ldc2006p1ch2\\_en.pdf](http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/ldc2006p1ch2_en.pdf).

## BECOMING A GLOBAL CITIZEN

by Patrick Lohier

Canada's rich history of volunteer-sending began more than 50 years ago. Since then, over 75,000 Canadians have volunteered in the global South, sharing and learning with thousands of communities and millions of people striving to better their lives. A cornerstone of this achievement is the work of Canadian volunteer-sending agencies that recruit and train Canadians of all ages and backgrounds to do effective cultural exchange and development work in disadvantaged and impoverished communities all over the world.

In recent years, a Volunteer Cooperation Agencies Coalition has formed, made up of diverse Canadian agencies committed to harnessing the power of volunteers. The Coalition includes Canada World Youth (CWY), Center for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI), Canadian Crossroads International (CCI), Canadian Executive Service Organization (CESO), CUSO, Oxfam-Québec, Solidarité Union Coopération (SUCO), VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) Canada and World University Service of Canada (WUSC). Each member of the Coalition has its own volunteer recruitment process, but they work in tandem to mobilize returned volunteers to sensitize the Canadian public and media about issues in international development. Their collaborative program is called Global Citizens for Change.

Canadians who want to participate and volunteer can choose the agency that is best suited to their goals, age and skills from among the Coalition agencies (as well as other agencies not in the Coalition). For example, Canadians as young as 17 years of age can participate in youth-oriented cultural exchange programs, e.g. Canada World Youth, university students or recent graduates can share skills and learning overseas, e.g. WUSC and CCI, professionals at mid-career can take longer-term assignments of up to two years, e.g. CUSO, Canadian Crossroads International, or VSO and mid-career, semi-retired or retired Canadians can contribute their decades-worth of professional experience, e.g. CESO.

The agencies' volunteer programs are wide ranging, including programs focused on governance, healthcare, business and management, HIV/AIDS, community local economic development, women's rights, education, environment and natural resources, cultural exchange, human rights, science, agriculture and engineering, social and community work and technical and information technology development. There is a place for just about anyone interested in volunteering, as long as he/she can demonstrate the ability to be constructive, attentive, collaborative, adaptive, creative and analytical. Regardless of the agency picked, those who pursue volunteering will find it a life changing and

rewarding experience.

Anyone interested in volunteering overseas should seriously consider their options for the best "fit" between their own expectations and the types of work the agencies do. Below are questions to consider when researching volunteer agencies:

### The Agency:

- What are the goals of the agency?
- Are the agency's goals in tune with your goals?
- Who does the agency serve?
- How many volunteers serve the agency?
- How is the agency funded?

### The Volunteer's Experience:

- What does the agency expect of its volunteers?
- Is the agency looking for specific skills or qualities in its volunteers?
- What type of service does the agency need (cultural exchange, education, social and/or economic development, etc.)?
- What type of orientation and training do volunteers receive?
- Who supervises volunteers?
- What kind of feedback or evaluation are volunteers expected to provide following their work overseas?
- What kind of feedback or evaluation do volunteers receive for their work overseas?

### The Volunteer's Involvement:

- Must volunteers agree to a specific time commitment, e.g. number of days, weeks or years?
- What skills or qualities can volunteers develop as a result of working with the agency?
- What out-of-pocket expenses, if any, might a volunteer incur?
- Are volunteers encouraged to do any volunteer or advocacy work while in Canada?

Below are members of the Volunteer Cooperation Agencies Coalition. People interested in volunteering can visit the agencies' websites to start their research or contact the agencies to get answers to specific questions. (Note: First point of contact for both CECI and WUSC is their collaborative international cooperation programme, Uniterria. WUSC and CECI each recruit volunteers to the positions that fall into their areas of expertise and each has their own application form.)

### Canada World Youth (CWY)

Tel: 1-866-7-VOYAGE

E-mail: [recruitment@cwj-jcm.org](mailto:recruitment@cwj-jcm.org)

Website: <http://www.cwj-jcm.org/>



### **Center for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI)**

Tel: (514) 875-9911 ext. 295

E-mail: [nancyl@ceci.ca](mailto:nancyl@ceci.ca)

Website: <http://www.uniterra.ca>

### **Canadian Crossroads International (CCI)**

Tel: (416) 967-1611 / toll-free: 1-877-967-1611

E-mail: [info@cciorg.ca](mailto:info@cciorg.ca)

Website: <http://www.cciorg.ca/>

### **Canadian Executive Service Organization (CESO)**

Tel: 416-961-2376 / toll free: 1-800-268-9052

E-mail: [volunteers.toronto@ceso-saco.com](mailto:volunteers.toronto@ceso-saco.com)

Website: <http://www.ceso-saco.com/>

### **CUSO**

Tel: (613) 829-7445 / toll-free: 1-888-434-2876

E-mail: [info@cuso.ca](mailto:info@cuso.ca)

Website: <http://www.cuso.org/>

### **Oxfam-Québec**

Tel: (514) 937-1614

E-mail: [info@oxfam.qc.ca](mailto:info@oxfam.qc.ca)

Website: <http://www.oxfam.qc.ca/>

### **Solidarité Union Coopération (SUCO)**

Tel: (514) 272-3019

E-mail: [montreal@suco.org](mailto:montreal@suco.org)

Website: <http://www.suco.org/>

### **VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) Canada**

Tel: (613) 234-1364 / toll-free: 1-888-VSO-2911

E-mail: [inquiry@vsocan.org](mailto:inquiry@vsocan.org)

Website: [www.vsocan.org](http://www.vsocan.org)

### **World University Service of Canada (WUSC)**

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*Patrick Lohier is CESO's Public Engagement Officer, responsible for mobilizing CESO's Volunteer Advisers across Canada to inform the Canadian public and media about issues in international development.*

## **TRAVELS WITH MY DAUGHTER: OUR JOINT ADVENTURE IN LESOTHO**

by John Graham

I was not enthusiastic when colleagues at the Institute On Governance (IOG), a not-for-profit think tank based in Ottawa, suggested to trip to Lesotho in the summer of 2006. The work would be a part of a Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) sponsored project that the IOG was undertaking, the aim of which was to empower youth in the fight against HIV/AIDS. I would work with government officials but, my colleagues assured me, the more interesting aspect of the trip might be voluntary work with some civil society groups.

Before turning them down – I travel a lot in my job throughout Canada and the thought of that long flight to southern Africa in the heart of their winter frankly appalled me – I decided to consult my family. To my surprise my daughter Anna, who was then 25 and an elementary school teacher, was more than enthusiastic. She wanted to come with me and was not about to take no for an answer. Much like her compliant grade 2/3 students, faced with this spellbinding, insistent bundle of energy, I saw no way out but to agree. And I am glad I did.

We had travelled many times together, had shared accommodations, were comfortable with each other's routines (I still think Anna could be a tad neater, but that's another story), and had a lot of common interests. We both liked to read and stay very active by jogging, walking, working out and hiking.

Neither of us was really prepared for the many surprises that awaited us in our accommodations in Maseru, the capital of Lesotho, for we had decided to stay at the orphanage where Anna had arranged a three week volunteer assignment. The first surprise was the cold, especially at night when temperatures hovered around the freezing mark. Our hut at the orphanage was a handsome new building, round with a high thatched roof, very African, but unheated. It brought back memories, horrible memories I might add, of winter camping with my older son's scout troop so many years ago. The continuous barking of dogs into the late evening and the crowing of roosters in the early morning made matters even worse. Sleeping was not one of our African highlights.

The warmth and generosity of our hosts, four African-born Catholic sisters who ran the orphanage, more than made up for the African cold. They were wonderful individuals and we marvelled constantly at their dedication, their work ethic and good humour in the face of so much poverty and suffering. Oddly, they liked having a male, an older, white male at that, associated with the orphanage, even for such a brief time. It gave their establishment added lustre as one

explained to me with a wry smile on our day of departure.

While the Sisters were remarkable, it was the children that captivated us. Anna worked with a daycare centre in the mornings and my eternal memory is a group of some 20 to 30 children following her around in the yard, laughing and yelling, as she played a never-ending series of games with them, language posing no barrier. Then there were the older kids ranging in age from four to five to late teens – the 60 or so orphans who were the permanent residents. Anna tutored groups of them at night in English and I tried to help out in mathematics. She also went to their schools and spoke at their English clubs. Having a young adult like Anna, who was not an authority figure, was a tonic for many of them, especially the teenage girls, who became more and more inquisitive and candid. Comparing African and Canadian mores was a mouth-dropping, unforgettable experience for Anna and her new friends.

Our captivation with these irrepressible kids was nonetheless tinged with much sadness. Almost all went to school but their classes were hopelessly large (60 to 70 students in some cases). Most of their courses were in English, their second language. The teaching methods were antiquated and they had no ongoing support after classes. With few exceptions, they were struggling. Every day we worried about what would become of them. At the end of our stay Anna and I decided to sponsor one of the younger children, of whom we had both become very fond. We think of her often.

We have other memories besides the orphanage – of a taxi we had hired running out of gas, forcing me and the driver to push the car to the top of a hill so that we could coast to a gas station; of a wonderful weekend in a Lesotho tourist lodge, which turned out to be more rustic than we expected (but all the more enjoyable because of the other visitors we met and ate with); of two days in Cape Town and seeing the breath-taking coast line that leads to the Cape of Good Hope; of meeting by chance two high ranking officials from Mauritius on an airplane to Johannesburg and sharing observations about Africa with them; and of our many walks in Maseru itself, marveling at how another culture seems to work in some important instances and not work in others, especially in the treatment of women.

The irony for me of course, is that I cannot wait to return. The eyes of our little sponsored child, not to mention the Sisters and many of the other people we met, are drawing me (and Anna) back like a magnet.

*After receiving an Honours B.A. from Queen's University in mathematics and economics in 1967, Mr. Graham graduated from York University in 1969 with a Masters in Business Administration. He worked for the Ontario and federal governments before joining the Institute on Governance, an Ottawa-based think tank. John is married with three children.*

## **QUILTING A BETTER WORLD... ONE SQUARE AT A TIME**

by Arlena de Bruin

When Kamloops' CanGo Grannies voted in favour of designing a quilt to raise funds for grandmothers in Africa, they probably did not realize the scope and magnitude of such an undertaking. Since the quilt's inception in mid-2005, this group of volunteer women has managed to pull together what could possibly be the most inspiring group of Canadian icons this country has ever seen.

"To be honest," says CanGo Treasurer Lois McClary, "I've never heard of anything being done like this before."

What they have managed to accomplish in the past 18 months is no small feat. The goal was to patch a quilt together with the signatures of some of Canada's most famous and influential people. They would then sell the quilt to raise money for grandmothers in Africa who have been struggling to raise their families in the midst of an AIDS epidemic.

The group targeted celebrities and people they believe to have made a significant contribution to Canada. Hundreds of politicians, artists, musicians and athletes were mailed a letter and sent a three inch square of fabric for them to sign and send back. Despite having to send letters a second or third time in some cases, the CanGo Grannies were able to collect 200 signatures in all. "The biggest job of all," says Lois, "was finding contact information for each individual and having our request heard and not lost amidst the fan mail."

The list of individuals who contributed to the humanitarian effort is truly inspiring. People such as: Paul Anka, Margaret Atwood, Dan Akroyd, Don Cherry, Jean Chretien, W.P. Kinsella, Rita MacNeill, Peter Mansbridge, Steve Nash, Bobby Orr, Celine Dion, Wayne Gretzky, Kiefer Sutherland, David Suzuki, Brian Mulroney, Robert Bateman, Roberta Bondar, June Callwood, Leonard Cohen, Karen Magnussen, Christopher Plummer and Mike Weir.

According to Lois, although getting the signatures was sometimes difficult, it was amazing how everyone pitched in. "For example, when we were having difficulty getting in touch with Mike Weir, his brother actually took the square to him in Utah and then brought it back."

The display quilt, which they plan to have completed this spring, is six feet by seven feet in size and is laid out in the shape of the Canadian flag. The group will then have the quilt appraised and decide the best method of selling it to raise the most funds possible for the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign. To date, the CanGo Grannies have raised over fifty-thousand dollars for grandmothers in Africa, but this would be their greatest fundraiser yet.

“We’re hoping we can raise one hundred-thousand dollars for the African grandmothers,” says the treasurer. Whether that is through a private sale, an online auction, a dinner draw or through corporate sponsorship, the CanGo Grannies hope the publicity raised from this venture will highlight the importance of the AIDS problem in Africa.

“When a number of us saw Stephen Lewis speak at the Thompson Rivers University in 2004, we were deeply moved,” says Lois. “When he said ‘to do nothing is murder by complacency’ we knew we had to do something.” Spearheaded by Sandy Abraham, Mary Jordan and Joan Leitch, the CanGo Grannies were formed. Since then, the group has encouraged other senior women across the country to do the same. There are now 145 groups across Canada who are actively fundraising for the Stephen Lewis Foundation and grandmothers in 14 different African countries.

“First these grandmothers must go through the pain of watching their own children die from the disease,” Lois says thoughtfully, “then they are left with the responsibility of looking after the grandchildren who have lost their parents. It’s not easy.”

Money raised will go to assist the African grandmothers in raising their grandchildren and becoming self sufficient. According to Lois, the money will provide things such as food, schooling, clothing, home improvements, seeds, garden supplies and even items such as sewing machines so the women can make and sell clothing as a means of income. “The money is really going somewhere worthwhile.”

If you would like to help or get involved, the CanGo Grannies encourage you to contact the Stephen Lewis Foundation by checking out their website at [www.stephenlewisfoundation.org](http://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org) or by sending donations to the Stephen Lewis Foundation, 501-260 Spadina Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, M5T 2E4.

A single act of kindness, sewn together by the love and commitment of a small group of women has produced a tapestry of hope and inspiration that reaches across the globe. Despite obstacles overcome, the CanGo Grannies have proven that no idea is too big when you put your heart and mind to it. Quilting a better world... one square at a time.

*Arlena de Bruin is a freelance writer and weekly columnist for newspaper and Web. She lives in Kelowna, B.C. and is currently writing her first novel. For comments or questions, please email [arlenadebruin@hotmail.com](mailto:arlenadebruin@hotmail.com)*

## BOOK REVIEW

by Hugo Bastidas

*Buttertea at Sunrise. A Year in the Bhutan Himalaya.*

*Britta Das*

Seudja - buttertea in the Sharchhopkha language, is a dark tea enriched with butter and salt. Add a handful of zao, toasted rice, and you have all the liquid and floating ingredients needed to share tales about life, love and the volunteer work of Britta Das, a Canadian physiotherapist who embarked on a volunteer placement with VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) in Mongar, Eastern Bhutan.

In the book's prologue, a young student faces a rite of passage. Standing at the beginning of an abrupt precipice the Lama asks the young monk to look beyond his toes clawing the rugged edge of the cliff. Fixing his gaze on the distant skyline of the mountain ridge is not an option. There is something for the eyes to discover in the vast emptiness lying centimetres beyond his feet. The student is paralyzed by fear. The Lama invites him to remember old teachings and a precious mantra. Strengthened, the student leans forward and now he can see below the golden pinnacle of a hidden monastery reflecting the sunrise.

For Britta Das, volunteering overseas seems to fit this analogy quite nicely. She replaced a promising career and the comforts of a well-equipped clinic specializing in injuries of high-output athletes, with a hospital in Mongar where her hands and teachings alleviate chronic pain of older women labourers and physical disabilities of school-aged girls. As she wanders through vertical landscapes and elemental altars in living rooms and colourful temples, profound bonds with people and culture develop steadily. Her role as educator and trainer of Pema, the local physiotherapist, is reciprocated by the learning from Pema's aging father about the calming power of meditation and prayer in everyday life.

In one of the final chapters, as the Bhutanese lunar calendar is about to begin again, we are invited to share a joyful farewell. The perseverance, resilience and generosity often implicit in volunteering overseas is echoed by the multiple voices of a large extended family and by the sounds of all available musical instruments: cymbals, long and short bamboo flutes, trumpets and horns. In and out of tune, volunteer and host celebrate mutual past accomplishments and begin the longing for one another.

*Hugo Bastidas is Training and Development Advisor for VSO CANADA.*

## PEER EXPERT

### Scenario:

*What are the current best practices for preparing Canadians for their first experience volunteering in the developing world? In particular, with regard to living and working in a new culture, managing expectations and dealing with change.*

### Response:

Volunteers working abroad face challenges that go beyond the basic dos and don'ts of any particular culture. Certain elements arise during one's overseas assignment, such as trumped expectations and the emotional roller-coaster of culture shock and adaptation that necessitate pre-departure training in order to enhance in-field performance.

"Development programs or initiatives which fail to take into account their impact on culture - and the impact of culture on them - are likely to fail, or, at best, to misunderstand the cause of their success. The very concept of development is cultural and the way in which it is understood by different communities will be inseparable from their concepts, values and traditions. Development aspirations and concerns, as well as the approaches taken to it, are inescapably linked to culture."

Recognizing Culture: A series of briefing papers on culture and development. Comedia, Department of Canadian Heritage, UNESCO (2001)

In an effort to improve the effectiveness of Canadians working internationally, The Centre for Intercultural Learning set out to describe the competencies that are displayed by interculturally effective people and to design a course to equip Canadians with the skills and knowledge to perform successfully in an international context.

Research has clearly established a direct causal link between intercultural competence at an individual level, and the ability to deliver aid effectively. Based on the results of this research, The Centre for Intercultural Learning offers competency-based pre-departure training to prepare Canadian volunteers for their work experience abroad. The Centre's research identified a very specific set of competencies and behaviours exhibited by an interculturally effective person, i.e. someone who is able to live contentedly and work successfully in another culture. These are outlined and explained in the Profile of the Interculturally Effective Person (IEP), and are the learning points around which the Pre-Departure course is designed.

### Competency-based pre-departure courses

The pre-departure course in intercultural effectiveness is grounded in principles of adult learning. The most fundamental principle is experiential learning, which

encourages participants to draw on their own experience, frame it in a new way, add layers of knowledge and apply that learning in their upcoming assignment. The course is designed based on the framework of the interculturally effective person, which has three main attributes:

1. The ability to communicate with people of another culture in a way that earns their respect and trust.
2. The capacity to adapt his or her professional skills (both technical and managerial) to fit local conditions and constraints.
3. The capacity to adjust personally so that s/he is content and generally at ease in the host culture.

From this set of core competencies, course participants enhance their knowledge and skills in the following areas of intercultural effectiveness.

- **The Concept of Culture:** Participants come away from the course with an understanding of the concept of culture, as well as how one's culture influences one's own values, beliefs and actions.
- **Adaptation:** Participants compare the usual manifestations (or symptoms) of culture shock in foreign assignments with their own ways of reacting to stress. They then develop personal strategies for actively managing adaptation in order to enjoy living and working in the host country.
- **Intercultural Communication:** Participants are taught to understand cross-cultural decoding techniques as empathetic activities that precede communication, and to recognize the links between cultural behaviours and the main cultural parameters that render these logical and consistent. In addition, participants are trained to comprehend other people's values and beliefs in relation to one's own reasons and referents and to describe the different modes of communication in use in our culture versus those used in their host country.
- **Mandate Preparation:** Participants begin to define their mandate while maintaining realistic expectations based on developing a tolerance for ambiguity. They also identify the project stakeholders and analyze their interests. The ability to clearly define the purpose, successful outcomes and indicators of success for the assignment is also a key feature of the course.
- **Knowledge of the Host Country and Culture:** Participants are provided the opportunity to field any specific questions about their host country to a national from that country who will spend individual time with them during the last day of the course. This provides practice interacting with and learning from a host national who can describe the historical, political and economic factors, and the cultural context of their mandate in the host country.
- **Personal Safety Abroad:** There are risks intrinsic to travelling and working abroad. There are failed and fragile states where risks are greater due to social, economic or political situations. In today's world, personal safety abroad



training is seen as a key risk mitigating strategy by Canadian organizations such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the volunteer sending organizations they sponsor. It is top of mind for most cooperants that their ability to manage and minimize risks to their personal safety affects personal and professional effectiveness in the new cultural environment. The challenge for volunteer cooperants is to balance awareness and safety without withdrawing and being defensive. An effective interculturalist exhibits curiosity, socializes with local people, explores the environment, tries local food, participates in local practices and traditions, etc. It is important to find a way to build bridges, rather than build walls.

As well, organizations sending volunteers into the field need to ensure their participants do the following:

- Provide organization volunteers with clear guidelines and procedures for emergency situations, i.e.: who to contact, emergency numbers etc.
- Register online with their local Canadian embassy before you leave Canada ([www.voyage.gc.ca](http://www.voyage.gc.ca)).
- Read the travel warnings for their country of assignment, (<http://www.voyage.gc.ca/dest/ctry/reportpage-en.asp>) as well as pertinent country information ([www.intercultures.gc.ca](http://www.intercultures.gc.ca)).
- Visit a travel clinic for all necessary vaccinations and/or medications well before the travel date, as many vaccinations require several staggered visits.
- Ensure proper health insurance coverage, including emergency evacuation coverage.

In addition to participant learning in our pre-departure course in intercultural effectiveness, the course often results in participants identifying things they did not realize they did not know. Therefore the training is ideally taken four to six weeks prior to departure to allow participants sufficient time to prepare in areas they wish to further research.

### **The value of pre-departure training**

Most participants have some degree of international experience but participants on first assignments greatly benefit both from the course content and the previous experience of others. Participants leave with new intercultural and professional knowledge and skills applicable to their assignment. Participant reactions to the course focus on the benefits of the adult education based training model, noting the “concrete examples” and “real experiences” they drew from the course.

Finally, a best practice in determining the value of any training is to measure participant learning and the transfer of skills, or performance assessment. The

Centre for Intercultural Learning is currently working on a transfer level evaluation of pre-departure courses to determine to what extent in-classroom learning transfers to intercultural performance in the field. Results of the in-field evaluation are to be published in the fall of 2007.

*Suzanne Montford is a Senior Learning Advisor for the Centre for Intercultural Learning (Canadian Foreign Service Institute). Mara Munro is a recent graduate of McGill University and is currently working on contract with the Centre for Intercultural Learning. For 38 years, the Centre for Intercultural Learning has been preparing Canadians for assignments abroad. Over the years, our training programs have been designed to maximize the acquisition of the intercultural skills vital to a successful international experience. Please visit our website for more information: [www.intercultures.gc.ca](http://www.intercultures.gc.ca).*

### Footnotes

1. Kealy, Daniel J. Cross-Cultural Effectiveness - A Study of Canadian Technical Advisors Overseas. Centre for Intercultural Learning, Canadian Foreign Service Institute, 2001.

## **CJVRM READER SURVEY**

Thank you to all who took time at the recent PAVR-O and CAVR conferences to complete the surveys circulated by our editorial team. Your feedback is invaluable and will help our plans for the Journal for the coming year. If you did not have a chance to complete the questionnaire, there is still an opportunity to do so. Email [contact\\_cjvrm@yahoo.ca](mailto:contact_cjvrm@yahoo.ca) to obtain a copy.

We are most impressed by the number of people who expressed interest in joining our team as Regional Advisors. We hope this new role will help strengthen the reach and relevancy of the Canadian Journal of Volunteer Resources Management for those working in the field across the country.

Congratulations to Julia De Paz, Coordinator of Volunteer Services at Chelsea Park Retirement Community in London, Ontario who won the draw at the PAVR-O conference for a \$25 gift certificate from Chapters. The winner from the CAVR conference will be listed in our next issue.

# JOURNAL OF VOLUNTEER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

## Editorial Process and Guidelines for Authors

### Objective

The Journal of Volunteer Resources Management is intended:

1. to serve as a credible source of information on the management of volunteers in Canada;
2. to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and to encourage networking among managers of volunteers;
3. to provide a professional development tool for managers of volunteers;
4. to recognize and encourage Canadian talent in the field of management of volunteers;
5. to include in each issue at least two articles that will consider different views on a specific and predetermined theme.

### Target Audience

The Journal's intended audience includes managers of volunteers, educators, media and funders of not-for-profit organizations across the country.

### Submissions

All manuscripts will be accepted on diskette or via e-mail in either Microsoft Word or Word Perfect. Submissions should be written according to "Canadian Style - A Guide to Writing and Editing" - Secretary of State, Dundurn Press. External reviewers may be engaged to review content if deemed advisable by the committee.

The revised draft is edited for clarity and consistency by the Editorial Team.

The edited version is returned to the author for acceptance along with an approval form for signature.

The signed form is to be returned to the Editorial Team within a week along with any suggestions for final revisions.

### Format and Style

Authors are asked to respect the following word counts:

	Words	Pages
<b>Lead Article</b>	1000	5-6
<b>Secondary Article</b>	700-800	2-3
<b>Book Review</b>	150	1

The lead article will look at the topic in some depth and will normally require the author to conduct research into current trends and perspectives on the subject.

The secondary article will adopt a more practical approach, including personal experiences and opinions.

### Advertising

Limited advertising space will be allowed in the Journal, for materials of direct relevance to managers of volunteer service, and as long as it conforms to the guidelines set out by the Editorial Team.

### Guidelines:

1. Only ¼ page and ½ page ads will be accepted.
2. Ad must be camera-ready.
3. A maximum of one page of ads will be permitted per issue.
4. Job ads are not recommended.
5. Cost is to be determined by the Editorial Team.

## LOOKING AHEAD

**July 16-18, 2007**

2007 National Conference on Volunteering and Service  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
<http://www.volunteeringandservice.org/conferenceinfo.cfm>

**October 3-5, 2007**

Association of Volunteer Resources Management Conference  
Dallas, Texas  
<http://www.avrm.org/>

## DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSIONS & THEMES

Issue	Deadline	Theme
Volume 15.3	articles due on the 31st of July	Dollars and Sense
Volume 15.4	articles due on the 30th of September	Managing Conflict