

VISTA SERVES:

The Migrant

"Without VISTA's help, the faith they put in us and the faith they showed in us, none of this could have been possible. It's a good feeling, and most of the guys admit it amongst themselves, to look over your shoulder and see some narco agent back there, and know you got nothing to hide. It's a real good feeling to be part of the community instead of being on the outskirts of it. And we are slowly and surely getting rid of that chip on our shoulders, and that chip is trouble, not small trouble, but big trouble."

--Vicente Trevino, 17,
Parlier, California

Nearly a fourth of the nation's seasonal agricultural work is performed by migratory laborers who earn, on the average, \$657 a year from their efforts.

Near nomads, the migratory laborers roam from Texas to northern Michigan, from Southern California to the Pacific Northwest, and from Florida up the Atlantic seaboard to New York and New England.

There are no laws to protect their children against the dangers of child labor---in the third most hazardous industry in the United States. Forty states deny the migrant worker general welfare assistance unless---a contradiction in terms---they can meet residence requirements of as long as six years.

THE DEPRIVED

Migratory workers and their children have been called "the most educationally deprived" group in our nation. Their average school achievement is at the fourth grade level. Most enter school in November and leave in the spring four to six weeks before school closes. Others dribble in much later, even during the seventh and eight months of school.

And their education of today reflects itself directly in their hope for tomorrow. For generations the migrant child has had a single bleak prospect for the future: to roam, as have their parents, among some 31 states.

VISTA: 'THE KEY'

VISTA's approach to the problems of the nation's 316,000 migrant workers has been called "the key to any lasting solution of the problems facing migratory farm workers."

In making this statement, U.S. Senator Harrison A. Williams of New Jersey, chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Migratory Labor, added, "By living and working with our migrant farm laborers, VISTA Volunteers are providing the badly needed link between the migrant farm family and the Federal government."

Today there are 330 VISTA Volunteers working, serving and living among the migrants of 12 states. They are assigned to 18 specific projects.

BRICK BY BRICK

From California to Oregon, for example, 105 VISTA Volunteers are helping migrant laborers develop leaders so that they will be represented on advisory committees concerned with the migrants' problems.

In Florida alone 121 Volunteers are working in programs designed to improve health, housing and education for migrant families.

In each of the states to which the VISTA Volunteers have been assigned, they are conducting pre-school classes among migrant children and helping mothers and grandmothers to organize and operate their own day-care centers. In one case, three young VISTA Volunteers assisted migrant mothers in building a day-care center brick by brick, with a hand operated brick-making machine borrowed from an Indian reservation.

BASIC EDUCATION

The problems of the migrants often center around the most basic education---learning to speak English, for instance. VISTA Volunteer Elizabeth Burnham, has started English classes for migrant families near Gilroy, California.

"We meet under a tree or wherever convenient, usually in the evening, and work on basic conversational English," said Miss Burnham. "The migrants seem to show a definite interest in learning English. They feel that this is one of their first needs for they want to communicate with their children in English."

Miss Burnham, who has a master's degree in home economics from Columbia University, is also planning projects to improve the migrants' nutritional level and sanitation practices.

IN THE WEST

Arlene Isaacson, 20, of Beverly, Massachusetts, has been assigned by VISTA to West Stayton, Oregon, to work with migrant families. Her first duties were to obtain welfare assistance for a

number of migrant families; to get adults to attend English classes and children to go to summer school, and to secure medical attention for the sick.

"I thought it would be easy to get a doctor," she said. "That turned out to be absurd. Most doctors in this area won't take a migrant patient. One or two of them have been cooperative, but we usually wind up having to take the migrants to Salem."

IN THE EAST

On the Atlantic seaboard, Ray McGill, a VISTA Volunteer from Alabama, and Jim Buyocus of New York, are now working with migrants in 12 camps in North Carolina's Currituck, Camden and Pasquotank counties.

In addition to their efforts to improve the migrants' education, they have also introduced a recreation program that gives direction and organization to the farm workers' free-time activities---often for the first time in their lives.

Even after spending 10 hours in a hot dusty field, McGill says, "When we arrive with a ball, a few gloves and a bat or two, they actually run out to the makeshift diamond. They play with fantastic enthusiasm."

He pointed out that the recreation program is combating the after-work idleness that causes a number of the migrants trouble with the police as a result of fights and drunkenness. Police officials in the area say that the number of migrants involved in violations is declining steadily since the new programs were started by VISTA Volunteers.

HELD FOR 'HOODLUMS'

Parlier is in Fresno County, California, and Mexican-Americans there have lower incomes and lower educational attainment than in any other county in the state. The sons of migrant farm workers formed a gang that the citizens sometimes feared. The police labeled them as "a bunch of Mexican hoodlums."

Two VISTA Volunteers, Lucy Norman and "Skip" Pease, have been working with the migrant families. One of their projects has centered around the 40 teenage Mexican-Americans described as "hoodlums."

Through the efforts of a city employee, 15 to 20 of the boys were meeting once a week in a living room to talk about themselves and their needs. When the Volunteers arrived, they made the group a VISTA project.

"Simply being associated with VISTA did several things to the group," Lucy Norman says. "It gave them a certain prestige in their own eyes and in the eyes of the wary community, and it opened more doors to them. The number of boys increased to about 40, and we moved out of that crowded, smoke-filled room into the Community Center Building at the Federal Housing Project."

From there they transferred to the American Legion Building where someone donated a television set and the group met to talk, plan projects, and watch Shindig and Hullabaloo.

TEENS RAISE MONEY

The teenagers ran a dart booth at a community fair, washed windows and cleaned garages to raise \$19.50---the start of a fund to purchase their own building.

Vicente Trevino, a member of the group, said, "This may not mean much to you, but it means an awful lot to us because we've never really done anything, nothing at all, except create trouble---It's great, it's a good feeling to give something of yourself, to have people look at you and not say, 'there go hoods,' but 'there goes somebody who's trying.'"

THE DIFFERENCE

The citizens of Parlier, California, think the efforts of VISTA Volunteers Lucy Starr Norman and "Skip" Pease have paid off. They sent the following telegram to VISTA's Washington headquarters:

"To the 40 young men in Parlier, California, the VISTA program... means the difference between realization of a dream and continued failure. VISTA and the prestige of this name has given them new stature in their eyes and in the watchful eyes of the community. Only through their presence and leadership has the key to change been placed in their hands."

The problems that face the nation's migrant families are a long way from being solved. But as Senator Williams said, VISTA has "the key to any lasting solution."

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