VISTA seeks Rice volunteers for tutoring program

By SANDY COYNER
Thrasher Editorial Staff

"Can you help me?" the poster asks. "My name is Greg. I am eight years old. I am having trouble in school. There are many like me at all grade levels in Houston. Please give us a hand . . . ."

VISTA has come to Houston, and is searching the local campuses for volunteers to help in their new tutorial programs concentrated in the First and Fifth Wards of the city.

The initials mean "Volunteers In Service to America." Often billed as the domestic Peace Corps, VISTA places volunteers in trouble spots in the US for their one-year volunteer periods.

Sixteen Here

Sixteen such workers are currently in the Houston area, working in co-operation with the Houston Council on Human Relations and other groups, but mostly on their own. The tutoring project is one of those in which other local people can help.

Interested Rice students should attend a meeting of the Houston Council on Human Relations, 5405 Austin, at 4 pm Tuesday, Oct. 4, or call at JA 6-1829.

The program has been organized by two young volunteers, Sandy McElroy and Kathy Boom.

Children to be tutored are in the 4th through 6th grades, and are recommended for the project by their principals. Space for the tutoring is provided by churches and neighborhood centers in the immediate vicinity of the schools themselves.

The program is well-organized: each center will be supervised by a "captain," and volunteers are asked to sign for a regular schedule of 1 to 1½ hours per week, in one or two sessions.

Adults Too

Some professional educators and adults from the area, as well as college students, will be tutoring. The age group has been specially selected because, although "they have the basic skills by now—they can read and write— they often get bogged down." In Kashmere Gardens Elementary, one of the schools in the project, (the school is "about half Negro and half Latin," says Kathy) the one Remedial Reading teacher can only handle 75 students, and must concentrate on the younger pupils.

Kathy and Sandy emphasize that the tutoring will stress a one-to-one personal relationship between volunteer and pupil.

"In some cases," Sandy says, this is the first time these children have had attention. Often just taking an interest can make a real difference to them."

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VISTA TUTORING
A personal friendship . . . .
Volunteer tutors sought

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The tutors in groups of 10 to 15 will be provided with two preliminary workshops. The workshops will be led by a local remedial teacher.

Grass Roots Work

This project illustrates well the "grass roots" nature of the local VISTA work.

They work very much on their own; the situation in Houston is what they call "unstructured."

"I think it is one of the most unstructured programs in the country," said Sandy. "It couldn't be more so; and I think this is very fortunate."

He and Kathy live in the areas in which they are working, and concentrate on learning to know and be accepted by the people who live around them.

"They're Testing Us"

"Right now," Kathy says, "they are testing us. They want to see if we can really do anything. Members of the community are beginning to bring their problems to the volunteers, to see if they can indeed help.

Sandy points out that an important part of his work is bringing these people to the local agencies which can help them, for which the people are eligible, but of which they are ignorant.

Simply familiarizing himself with the myriads of agencies was a vast part of his preparation; and actually taking the citizens to the agencies and seeing that they do indeed receive the services is a big part of his work.

"It's not just a 9-to-5 job," the volunteers point out. "We go to their churches, their dances, share in everything."

Their work is indeed full-time, full-heart. Of Rice volunteers they ask only a much smaller contribution.