



The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

Servol (Service Volunteered for All) (Trinidad)

(1994)



for fostering spiritual values, co-operation and family responsibility in building society.

Father Pantin in front of center

Following riots in Trinidad's Port of Spain, which nearly precipitated a military coup, SERVOL (Service Volunteered for All) was set up in 1970 by Father Gerard Pantin, then a 41-year-old Trinidadian Catholic priest.

In its first six years SERVOL helped many communities to set up economic, educational and cultural projects. Over the next five years, while more of such projects blossomed, SERVOL developed the important new concept of the Life Centre with departments that included: a day-care unit for babies, one for toddlers, a skill-training centre for over 200 young men and women between the ages of 17 and 19; and dental and medical clinics. A remarkable interaction between these departments led to the discovery 'that this Centre was taking on the role of a parent substitute'. The Life Centre programme was formulated, engaging adolescents in a unique mix of courses comprising personal development and awareness, education and training, acquisition of parenting skills and on-the-job experience.

With its community-based pre-schools and its Life Centre programmes in place, SERVOL decided to concentrate on these two age groups, 0-5 year olds and 16-19 year olds. From 1982 to '86 there was an expansion into the Caribbean of the SERVOL approach. Now SERVOL is working to train teachers and set up early childhood and adolescent programmes in close co-operation with 15 governments across the Caribbean. In 1990, SERVOL's teacher-training courses were given accreditation by the University of Oxford.

The Trinidad government went into partnership with SERVOL in 1986 and within seven years 5,000 children aged 3-5 were being taught in 149 pre-schools, while 45 Life Centres were training 3,750 adolescents. SERVOL's own staff numbered over 100 and more than 3,000 local people were involved in the management of 'their' centres in their own communities. Including parents, some 50,000 people are involved with SERVOL at any one time. Father Pantin retired as SERVOL's Director in 1992 to become its Chairman.

His executive role was taken over by Sister Ruth Montrichard, who had been with the organisation since 1974. SERVOL's annual budget is over US\$7 million, of which 60% is raised locally from its own activities or other sources. An important element of the SERVOL approach is that 'nothing in life is free, there is a price to be paid for everything'. So although much is subsidised, everyone pays something for what they get.

One key to SERVOL's success is, without doubt, its development approach based on a "philosophy

of ignorance": not assuming but asking people what their needs are and what type of help they want; attentive listening to their answers; a resolute avoidance of cultural arrogance, deriving from differences in background or education; and, only then, respectful intervention in a spirit of mutual benefit.

Quotation

"SERVOL is an organisation of weak, frail, ordinary, imperfect yet hope-filled and committed people, seeking to help weak, frail, ordinary, imperfect, hope-drained people become agents of attitudinal and social change in a journey which leads to total human development."

SERVOL mission statement

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AWARD FOUNDATION