

THE LABOURER TEACHER PROGRAM – FRONTIER COLLEGE

As Canada's original literacy organization, Frontier College has been recruiting dedicated volunteers to work with Canadian children, youth and adults from coast to coast since 1899. Alfred Fitzpatrick, the founder of Frontier College said, "We must educate the whole family wherever they earn a living." Thus was invented the Labourer-Teacher program with a 'have book will travel philosophy'.

At the turn of the century, the needs were felt most keenly in far-flung places like lumber mills, on the railway gangs and in the mines across Canada. So it was that Fitzpatrick sent his Labourer-Teachers, a group of hardy individuals who worked with the men by day and volunteered to teach them by night.



Today, our Labourer-Teachers – mostly university and community college students - are placed in agricultural settings: on farms and processing plants in Southwestern and Central Ontario. Here they do the same heavy labour jobs as the seasonal workers. In peak season this can mean 12 hours per day, 6-7 days per week. For this work, the Labourer-Teachers are paid the same as their co-workers – usually the minimum wage in Ontario for farm labour.

In addition to the physical work, the Labourer-Teachers volunteer their time to provide educational and recreational opportunities for their co-workers. Most of their co-workers on these farms come from countries in Central America and the Caribbean who are in Canada on 8 month work visas. These activities are determined by the interests of the people in their workplace. For example a Labourer-Teacher might:

- Help workers upgrade their English skills
- Instruct workers on the use of the computer
- Organize special events – a movie night, sporting event, travel to a tourist sight
- Give out and discuss information about workplace safety and procedures
- Provide peer counselling, mediation and contact with outside agencies such as doctors, dentists, hospitals, banks

What a former LT says: *"This experience has changed me profoundly! Every Canadian who eats should do this programme."*

If you know of anyone who would be interested in becoming a Labourer-Teacher they should contact Steve Freeman (sfreeman@frontiercollege.ca) at Frontier College.

