

gardening very seriously. He's currently taking in lectures in the Friends of the Farm series at the Experimental Farm.

SERV provides a wide range of administrative services which includes relocation services, medical appointments with Health Canada, pre-posting and re-entry briefings and workshops, spousal employment workshops, counselling services on education for dependants children, retirement workshops, information and documentation on missions as well as a variety of employee benefits information such as medical/dental plans, pension harassment policy, collective agreements, etc. The centre also has a small resource centre and is also responsible for the spousal employment program and the Awards and Recognition program. The centre is open from 8:00 to 17:00 and is located in the main lobby of the LB Pearson building.

The Work of the Community Co-ordinator

(or Tale of the Tea Party)

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the views of all members of the editorial board.

This article is written with all due respect to the quality and quantity of work that has been done by many Community Coordinators.

Why is it that, almost twenty years after its creation, the position of Community Coordinator (CC) is still considered to be nothing more than a second-rate "jobette," a post which women (and, perhaps, a few men) with experience and qualifications in areas including psychology, art history, engineering or communications, health, education and the arts are still a bit embarrassed to admit they fill? How could it be that, after all this time and effort, CCs are still often regarded as "tea party organisers" or "volunteer workers with salaries" who have little or nothing of interest to say?

I am quite proud of my CV, which I believe to be acceptable given my nomadic lifestyle. I also remain convinced of the importance of this position and derive great satisfaction from carrying out the responsibilities of the job, as well as others which are not included in my job description.

In 1982, I was hired by the mission in Paris to write a report defining the CC position and to carry out some of the associated

responsibilities. Two of my recommendations were ultimately dropped from the current CC mandate. The first was the recommendation that the CC, while providing some administrative services, should report directly to the Head of Mission and not be considered to be occupying a position that is purely administrative in nature. My second recommendation was that the CC should, where requested, act as an intermediary among Canadian employees, their families and the Head of Mission in situations which are difficult to resolve directly through or with the mission's administrative staff.

I would like to be wrong, to be convinced that this position has not remained in this vegetative state for such a long time or that employees - male and female - have not regarded it as an "afternoon tea thing for wives" because of Ottawa's failure to accept and act on my recommendations.

Having had over thirty years' experience as a diplomatic spouse, a mother raising four children in various countries abroad, a professional woman without a profession because my skill set was not related to the work of the Public Service and a francophone who quickly figured out that English had beaten out Esperanto, I believe that I have experienced most of the battles and lived up to almost every challenge that DFAIT has thrown the way of every spouse. I do not believe that I am speaking out of turn when I say that the most frequent problems upon arrival at a new post, those which often surpass culture shock in their intensity, are the daily logistical ins and outs.

The myriad and complicated misunderstandings and challenges related to the rotational life style may give rise to family disputes, the questioning of career choices, marital breakdown and depression. Despite all of this, yet again in 2000, the work description for the CC position remains limited to the following:

1. Information and orientation services
2. Community activities
3. Communication about community services

As it now stands, there is no mandate for the CC to act as an intermediary, no leverage or negotiating power afforded the position, no right to raise sensitive issues - in fact, the CC barely has the "right" to be informed. CCs have told me that they were not even aware of the mission's obligation to include them as members of the Housing Committee.

All of this might partly explain why so few men have agreed to dismiss their own self-respect and take on a "jobette" which is limited to photocopying recipes, organising afternoon tea parties and arranging community events which could ultimately be better organised by local

clubs and associations with more funds. As far as the employment ladder at the mission goes, the position of CC remains on the bottom rung. I deplore the fact that CC services are so under-utilized. Community Coordinators should have been called upon long ago to be more involved on committees which make decisions that have an impact on the well-being of the community. It should have been a requirement of all service-providers at the mission to meet regularly with the CC to inform her/him about their activities in various areas. Not only is this not the case, but, under the pretext of trying to eliminate the duplication of services, information which would enable the CC to really fulfil her/his responsibilities to the community is frequently no longer provided to the CC. In fact, this position has such a low profile that people would be surprised to realize that they could derive any benefit from it at all.

I also deplore the fact that the CC's job description lacks the necessary substance to give the position any credibility or usefulness. Ultimately, its low status and the lack of appreciation for its importance have served to justify the argument that the CC's salary should be based directly on the number of employees at a post, rather than on a serious consideration of the specific challenges related to life at individual missions.

Depending on their size and geographical location, missions are faced with a wide array of difficulties: the larger missions, with problems related to lodging, communication, transportation; the smaller missions with health risks, deficiencies in educational facilities and cultural activities; and various other missions with challenges including a difficult climate or local language. Has any other position offering services to the Canadian community which are related to lodging, furnishing, maintenance and relocation ever undergone a salary cut of over 20% simply because the number of Canadians at the mission has dropped from 80 to 79?

These problems cannot be resolved at the mission level. It is only Ottawa that has the power to reinforce the CC's job description. Ottawa alone can give the job more clout and credibility which would go a long way toward dispelling the notion that this position is simply an effort to console some spouses without careers by throwing them a few crumbs.

It is not simply a matter of salary levels. This problem is related to the description of work for a position that encompasses significant duties and important responsibilities that should command the corresponding respect. If the job description of the Community Coordinator is not reviewed, updated, expanded, reinforced and upgraded, I would say that any salary is too high.

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