

The Employee Assistance Program

Your Personal Resource Here and Abroad

Sometimes managing stress alone is just too much. Sometimes managers are just too much. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP), with three trained counsellors on board, can help you with your personal or professional problems, either directly or through referral, whether in Ottawa or abroad.

With offices in the Services Centre (SERV) and at the other end of the building, tucked away behind the Skelton lobby, the counsellors will respond to your call on the same day and make appointments with you ASAP. Services are for employees and their families.

Of the people who use the EAP, 83 per cent are employees, and 17 per cent are family members. The greatest issues facing people are work-related problems, followed by personal problems. Work-related problems include stress, interpersonal relations, career difficulties and harassment. Personal problems include marital/family issues, drug or alcohol dependency, psychological/emotional problems, and financial and health related questions.

Brenda Abud-Lapierre, EAP coordinator and counsellor, says that the EAP "is the first line for help" for DFAIT staff and families. "People who come to us will either find help here or be referred to community resources. If it is a question of harassment, for example, you will be referred to the DFAIT Advisor on Harassment, Marc Leclaire (HRE).

The EAP also offers executive coaching and training, providing advice and consultation services to managers who have to deal with a

difficult situation such as implementing change or having to deal with an under-performing employee. EAP also offers one on one training for managers who need or want to improve their skills in HR management. Between 150-200 employees come to EAP for management consultations each year.

"Most of the people who come to see us are self-referred," says Ms. Abud-Lapierre. "Some are referred by their managers, but it is always voluntary and always confidential," she stresses. "The program is a tool to help people."

The three mental health professionals on staff know the Department and are familiar with a variety of work-related and social problems. "Our mandate is to ensure that people get the services they need," says Ms. Abud-Lapierre. "We are not here to twist arms. When people get to know us, they gain confidence in us, in our service and trust the confidentiality we promise. Employees and families may think they have to keep a stiff upper lip in this very competitive environment, which makes their lives very stressful. We are here to help."

EAP offers noon-hour programs advertised on Signet and in Panorama, or you can call 992-6167 for information or an appointment.

SERV's Jim Davidson: *Portrait of an Important Fixture*

Jim Davidson is well-placed in the SERV Centre. He is the first person you meet as you enter off the main lobby of the Pearson Building, as you begin rounds for going out or returning from a posting, pick up a passport, need major league help with the inventory program or, as a family member of an employee, need to use the telephone,

computer or other resource. He is usually the voice on the telephone and the person behind the e-mail response to your question at a post.

Jim is many things to many people. A long-time employee at DFAIT, he has been at the SERV reception desk since 1992. Most people meet him sooner or later as SERV provides one-stop services to support all categories of employees and their families.

"Listening is the key to my job," says Jim Davidson. "People come in with questions and I have to refer them to the right resources. They come with stories, and I listen."

Jim listens very well. Thanks to exchanges with his "guests", as he calls them, he is able to be on top of useful web sites and find out the latest from travellers that he can pass on to others.

Often Jim has to juggle many people at time at the front desk: someone who is lost, someone seeking travel information, a delivery person and someone just back from posting. With his calm, kind demeanor, Jim handles it all.

His mandate is broad. He has to direct people interested in everything from retirement issues to compensation to travel arrangements to counselling. The returnee arrives at the desk rushed, stressed and in need of help. Jim determines the best source or sources of help. It might mean calling a service advisor to help the employee immediately. If it's an e-mail from someone abroad, people around Jim know that he's spent many an hour after his regular hours in research to be able to provide a useful reply by the time the client boots up his computer in the morning.

For relaxation from this busy but "gratifying" job, Jim cycles to and from work and on weekends, he swims and has delved into



The SERV Team: from left to right, Diane Eyre, Jim Davidson, Nicole Houle-Pelletier, Deborah Birrell, Sandra Pink, Sherry Smith, Sylvie Chenail, Gaylee Franey, Susan Dumouchel, Rick Hyndman, Michelle Wilcox.