

foreign household employees (and possibly their families) seemingly disrupting their privacy. Overseas, a household employee may be essential as a guardian of your home and as an interpreter of local language, customs and food.

In employing household staff you should rely heavily on the experienced members of the mission for advice. Check with the Community Coordinator, the embassy "Bulletin", and the local newspaper for leads. Often you will find that a maid or "houseboy" will be living at your new house when you arrive, having worked for the previous tenants. With luck, she or he will work out and you won't have to look elsewhere.

Make sure any prospective household employee is medically examined before you offer him or her a position. It is important to know that a prospective household employee is not suffering from a disease which could endanger your family's health. A chest x-ray to rule out active pulmonary tuberculosis is often imposed. Costs are reimbursable under the FSDs.

Know the local labour laws. In preparing to interview prospective household staff, think through the duties you will want to assign such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, entertaining and child care. A trial period may protect you from expensive commitments.

References should be checked if at all possible, particularly to make sure they belong to the person presenting them. Read references carefully for omissions. It is usually indicative if something important, for example, "honesty" is missing. If you need several household employees, choose your "number one" first. Clashes between household staff can be worse than fighting children. You may want to emphasize that it is the head employee's responsibility to ensure that the household functions smoothly.

Make sure both you and the household help know exactly what you will provide (quarters, furnishings, etc.) and that live-in help are expected to keep their quarters clean. Inspect them every once in a while. Generally, uniforms are provided by you. Pay the going wage but, depending on local custom, throw in little bonuses for excellent performance and you will find the excellent performance repeated more and more often. Don't hesitate to withhold a bonus as this will emphasize that your employee will be rewarded for excellent service only. If you need to fire a household employee, it may be preferable to offer severance pay and request immediate departure rather than risk retribution during a notice period.

5.6 Coping With Culture Shock, Money Problems and Chemical Dependency

Culture Shock

Having live-in household help is enough of a shock for anyone, but generally "Culture Shock" is one of the first "attitude" problems you will encounter overseas. Everyone experiences it to some degree at all missions, even those living in familiar countries. It is apt to affect your family more than yourself because they cannot seek refuge each day in the operational duties and sheltered environment of the Mission. They have to constantly cope with a "foreign" environment and the strain is far greater.

Fairly soon after you arrive at the mission, you will wake up one day and begin to realize just how different things are in comparison with life in Canada. All the articles you read, the films you saw and the conversations you had with others who have lived in the host country are now being put to the test. Many of the expectations have already been borne out but you have encountered a few surprises along the way. Perhaps you are feeling overwhelmed by your new environment and, as a reaction to it all, you are behaving unusually.

You and your dependants will have to make adjustments in order to get the most out of the posting. Try to remember that you are not alone and, as part of the Canadian foreign service community, there are others who have a stake in your happiness and who are willing to help.