

COMING HOME: CHILDREN

Eufasa 2010 working group

INTRODUCTION

When moving back to the employee's home country (HC), children generally face particular problems, different from those they meet when they are moving from one foreign posting to the next:

- Their parents' HOME country may not be THEIR home country at all (if they have never or hardly ever lived there). *"Parents come home; usually their kids are leaving home"* (David Pollock). Therefore their situation and perception can be totally different from their parents'.
- The home country may have changed. Their former friends and family members too, they may have wrong perceptions of what they have known as "home".
- Language problem: They may have difficulties in their "mother tongue"
- They feel as outsiders in their own country, nobody is interested in what they have seen, where they have lived
- They are not part of any group – other children in the HC may have been together from kindergarden onwards, at the local scouts group, dancing school etc....
- Their parents' financial situation and social position might be very different from abroad.
- Possible change from international school to local (public) school
- Mothers may have less time for their kids due to a job

In addition to the above-mentioned issues, there are the "common" difficulties; they always meet when moving, such as

- Leaving their old friends; the grief
- Loneliness as they do not know anybody
- Difficulty to fit into a group, to make new friends
- Change of school and of teachers
- New accommodation/new environment

What to do BEFORE the transition

- Long term measures

In order to keep up/ improve your child's (home country's) language skills:

- Playgroup
- Au-pair, baby sitter, who speaks the HC language
- Summer camps/schools in HC with local children
- Regular holidays in HC
- Local (HC) curriculum
- DVDs, television, books, magazines...
- Encourage keeping contacts with friends & family back home
- Invite peers from HC for holidays

- Short term measures to prepare transition

Schooling/higher education

Research/decide on schools (curriculum, extra curricula activities. etc)

Farewell for the kids/ spend enough time with them

Plan to stay in touch via Facebook/Skype etc.

Intensive language training

Summer camps in HC

Refreshing old contacts back home

Find out about the "current youth scene" in your HC especially with regard to drugs/alcohol/ sex education and speak about it with your kids

What to do UPON ARRIVAL

If possible, do not arrive at the last minute!

- Schooling

- Be an advocate for your children with their teachers, especially if it is a local school
Point out to them + and – (they may not know!)
- Get involved in school activities, parents' meetings
- Get in touch with other parents
- Encourage extra curricular activities, or continue the previous ones
- Meet teachers pro-actively

- Social environment

YOUNGER CHILDREN

- Encourage children to invite classmates, to join activities (scouts, music, sports...)
- Help them to make friends
- Explore their HC with them
- Involve them in cultural/local activities, not available abroad

TEENAGERS

- Peer pressure / bullying
- Dress Code/ brands
- Look out for red flags/signals
- Seek professional help
- Assist children in finding part time/summer jobs (using their foreign language skills, babysitting, catering, handy man jobs)
- Get children into extra curricular activities (such as dancing school, sports, volunteering...)

- General approach

- Stress the positive aspects of being a TCK
- Stress the positive aspects of “coming home”
- Try to provide continuity (friends, furniture, hobbies...)
- Do not pass on your own anxieties to your children
- Spend enough time with your children (prior to organising your house and job)

Suggestions to associations:

- Fight for the most flexible school system within your MFA!/you should be able to choose the most appropriate school for your child and get financial support from your MFA!
- Get financial support from your MFA for psychological advice for your kids upon returning home

Suggestions to MFA:

- Organize a summer school for the children, to improve language skills_and learn about HC culture
- Establish a list of suggested reading material for children abroad to keep up with HC level of education
- Organise on-line language courses for children abroad
- Liaise with Ministry of Education in order to purchase HC school books and/or DVD teaching material for children abroad
- Organise language courses for children who have recently come back home

CONCLUSION

“Most children turn out great” (Robin Pascoe)

Despite all the difficulties and challenges, most of the children will survive quite well , Many of them will grow up to be uniquely advantaged adults: They will be fluent in several languages, they will stay flexible and open minded and one day- it may seem very far away for you today- they might be grateful for the chance they had ,when they were moving with you from one place to another!

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