

Continuum of Support for Employees and Family Members on Unaccompanied Tours

The Department of State currently provides a number of services for employees preparing for, serving or returning from an assignment to an unaccompanied post. The offices offering the service are listed in parentheses at the end of each paragraph and contact information is given at the end of the document. Please note that many of the resource links are for State's Intranet website; others are available on the Internet. These services are described below.

Support BEFORE Your Tour: The Department provides a number of resources and services that may be helpful when an employee is considering bidding on an unaccompanied post:

- Background Information for Decision-making: FLO's Unaccompanied Tour Support Officer is available to employees and family members (including spouses, partners, parents, siblings, and children of all ages) considering an unaccompanied assignment to answer questions, clarify options and offer information and guidance on common concerns about unaccompanied tours. In addition to FLO's websites, other multi-media information on posts and courses is available. On State's intranet, FSI's Transition Center hosts "Destination: Iraq." Located at <http://fsi.state.gov/fsi/tc/default.asp?Sec=Overseas%20Briefing%20Center&Cat=DESTINATION:%20IRAQ>, it offers documents and supportive resources ranging from specific Iraq post information to online basic Arabic lessons. Also, the Transition Center collects country-specific information for all 282 posts (including unaccompanied posts) via the Post Info to Go search tool at: <http://fsi.state.gov/fsi/tc/epb/epb.asp>. And finally, Personal Post Insights offer candid, confidential assessments of life at post written by those already there. Personal Post Insights are at: <http://fsi.state.gov/fsi/tc/default.asp?Sec=Overseas%20Briefing%20Center&Cat=Personal%20Post%20Insights>. On the training front, the Transition Center offers a Saturday morning course MQ801: "Long Distance Relationships: Managing a Temporary Separation." (FLO) (FSI)
- Regional Bureau EX Personnel and the Career Development and Assignments (CDA): Potential unaccompanied post bidders are encouraged to speak with the Bureau Post Management Officer and with their Career Development Officer about what to expect on an unaccompanied assignment. (Regional Bureaus, CDA)
- FT610 - FACT Area Studies/Language Overview – Iraq: This course is designed to provide an orientation to Iraq including an overview of Iraq's history, political situation, culture and religion, U.S. policy interests and issues, and a brief language orientation. The course also includes an overview of Diplomatic Security support for the mission of Iraq, training from the Office of Medical Services (MED) and Diplomatic Security (DS) on coping with stress, and information from the Office of Casualty Assistance (OCA) and the Family Liaison Office (FLO). (FSI)
- Personal Contingency Planning: The Department provides information and resources on wills, life insurance, the Immediate Benefit Plan, powers-of-attorney, health proxies, IQ Quest, etc. This information is proactively given to all employees and contractors attending the FACT/Iraq class, and is available upon request to all others. (OCA, FLO, FSI, ER)
- Pre-Departure Seminar for Employees and Family Members: A pilot two-day Pre-Departure Seminar covering contingency planning, financial management, long-distance relationships and effective communication was offered on August 2 – 3 by FLO, in partnership with the Transition Center. Funded by the Cox Foundation, this Seminar will be repeated October 29-30, 2007 at FSI. (FLO, FSI)

Support DURING the Assignment: The Department also provides a number of resources and services to employees while they are serving at an unaccompanied post overseas:

- **Social Workers and Regional Medical Officers/Psychiatrists (RMO/P) at Post:** The Department of State deploys over 120 health care practitioners to Foreign Service posts throughout the world. These doctors, physician assistants and nurse practitioners, including both primary medical care providers and mental health providers, tend to the health needs of Foreign Service employees and their accompanying family members. A Clinical Social Worker provides full-time support to Foreign Service employees serving in Baghdad, with occasional trips to Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). (MED)
- **Social Workers in Washington, DC:** The Employee Consultation Service (ECS) is located in the Mental Health Section of the Office of Medical Services. The staff is comprised of experienced professional social workers that offer confidential employee assistance short-term counseling and referral assistance to Foreign Services employees and their families. Employees returning from unaccompanied tours and their family members may contact ECS for assistance with any questions or concerns they may be experiencing with the psychosocial adjustment process related to their unaccompanied tour. The ECS social work staff will meet with the employee or family member to assess their concerns and provide assistance and agency referral services. For further information, please contact the ECS administrative assistant at 202/663-1815.
- **Medevacs from Unaccompanied Posts:** Medevacs from post to Frankfurt, London, or some other overseas medevac site are authorized by the FS medical provider in the field (RMO or FSHP). Onward medevacs to the US for medical intervention and appointments in the Washington DC area are authorized by Washington. (MED/Foreign Programs, HR)
- **Support for Family Members (FLO):**
 - Emotional and administrative support is provided on an ongoing basis.
 - FLO advocates for changes to policy, regulations, and allowances, etc., based on reports from employees and family members.
 - The Mental Health Network (MHN) website and resources are provided to employees and family members throughout the duration of separation.
 - Monthly FLO/MHN e-newsletters and broadcast messages sent to employees and family members throughout the assignment.
 - Noontime Networking lunches are held on a monthly basis (third Wednesday of the month, in HST cafeteria) open to employees, tandems and adult family members experiencing (past, present or future) an unaccompanied or separated tour.
 - HomeFrontUS, an invitation-only listserv, is available to family members serving a separated tour; this is a virtual e-community of persons experiencing similar situations.
 - Information, resources and guidance/referrals for any pre-existing or newly developed educational or behavioral issues is provided. Long term separation from parents, especially if coupled with high anxiety, can have both immediate and delayed onset consequences for children.
 - Job search assistance for family members before, during and after an unaccompanied post assignment is provided.
 - Information on distance learning, career development, and functional training options is provided to family members.
 - Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) are encouraged to be aware of employees leaving to or transferring from unaccompanied posts and to reach out to them and their families. An increasing number of employees assigned to Iraq or the Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan are opting for a 12-month TDY

tour, in order that their families may remain at the previous post. CLOs are instrumental in offering support and information to the families. (CLO)

Support AFTER the tour: For employees returning from an unaccompanied tour, the Department provides the following support services:

- **Mandatory High Stress Assignment Outbriefs:** The Department provides a bi-weekly High Stress Assignment Outbrief for State Department and USAID personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Employees returning from tours at other unaccompanied posts are also welcome. The Outbrief is led by the Directors of the Transition Center and the Office of Mental Health Services and provides a two-way educational opportunity between the Outbrief leaders and the participants on issues raised by the unaccompanied tour.

Outbrief leaders share knowledge and tips they have gleaned from previous attendees about challenges the attendees may face in transitioning to a new assignment, and in the process of re-establishing family relationships and friendships. General medical information is provided about stress reactions ranging from temporary insomnia or mild and self-limiting conditions to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Guidelines are also provided for healthy coping strategies. The Outbrief is also an opportunity for attendees to provide feedback which has influenced the Department's efforts to best prepare and support employees before, during, and after their tours to unaccompanied posts. Participants are also advised how to access health care providers. Domestically, this can be done either through the Department by consulting with the Employee Consultation Service, or privately through their individual insurance plans. Overseas, they may consult with the Department's regional psychiatrists. (MED, FSI)

- **The Employee Consultation Service (ECS)** is located in the Mental Health Section of the Office of Medical Services. The staff is comprised of experienced professional social workers that offer confidential employee assistance short-term counseling and referral assistance to Foreign Services employees and their families. Employees returning from unaccompanied tours and their family members may contact ECS for assistance with any questions or concerns they may be experiencing with the psychosocial adjustment process related to their unaccompanied tour. The ECS social work staff will meet with the employee or family member to assess their concerns and provide assistance and agency referral services. For further information, please contact the ECS administrative assistant at 202/663-1815. (ECS)
- **Support Group for Returnees:** The Office of Medical Services offers a bi-weekly confidential emotional Support Group facilitated by two clinical social workers. The group is open to officers who have completed one or more assignments at unaccompanied posts who wish to discuss their experiences and reactions. (ECS)
- **Workers' Compensation:** The Office of Employee Relations provides one-on-one counseling, advice and guidance directly to employees, supervisors, overseas posts, and bureau executive offices. Domestic bureau workers' compensation coordinators and Post management and human resource officers are responsible for providing claim forms, transmitting them, and monitoring the employee's progress to ensure the employee receives appropriate medical treatment and returns to work when medically released. The Department of Labor, Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (DOL/OWCP) reviews and adjudicates all claims for medical treatment and short-term and long-term disability compensation. The Department encourages employees and supervisors to become familiar with the online Workers' Compensation Preparedness Kit and other comprehensive guidance for disabling traumatic and occupational illnesses that is available on the Intranet:
<http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/er/employment/WorkcompWorkComp.html>. (HR/ER)

- **Reasonable Accommodations:** The Office of Employee Relations (HR/ER) will work closely with injured employees returning from all posts, including unaccompanied posts, to ensure that they receive appropriate assistive technology and reasonable accommodations for their needs. This support will most often begin with their return to duty. Accommodations in the form of assistive technology are available for employees with injuries that have caused vision loss, dexterity impairments, hearing loss, and cognitive difficulties, including traumatic brain injuries. In conjunction with DOD's Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program, assessments will be arranged and assistive technology procured and provided to our employees. (HR/ER)
- **Casualty Support:** Within the Department, the Office of Casualty Assistance (OCA) acts as a single point of contact providing administrative assistance and ongoing support in the event of a casualty or death of a direct hire U.S. citizen Department of State employee in the United States or serving abroad or their family member, including those serving at unaccompanied posts.

The Department also offers support to all direct hire USG employees serving under Chief of Mission authority and their family members, including FSNs, and Department of State employees in the United States who are victims of terrorism, mass casualty, or certain other critical incidents, whether the victims are killed, injured or impaired. In the aftermath of a critical incident, trained volunteers from the Bureau of Human Resources may augment OCA's staff. (OCA)

- **Honoring casualties:** The Thomas Jefferson Star Award for Foreign Service is presented to those eligible employees who have been critically injured, or to the families of those who died in the service of their country. The Bureau may organize a memorial service in honor of an employee killed in the line of duty; OCA assists. (OCA, Performance Evaluation, Regional Bureaus)
- **Support for Family Members:**
 - Emotional support and administrative information are provided on an ongoing basis through the Family Liaison Office and Employee Consultation Services.
 - FLO's UT Support Officer uses a very inclusive definition of "family", e.g. spouses, partners, parents, siblings and children of all ages.
 - Certificates and Medals of Recognition are provided to children of employees on unaccompanied tours (UTs) annually on/about Foreign Affairs Day. This year, children in the DC area were also honored at the annual Foreign Service Youth Awards Ceremony on July 10th.
 - FLO advocates for changes to policy, regulations, allowances, etc., based on reports from returning employees.
 - The Managed Health Network (MHN) website, telephonic assessment, and other resources such as the FLO/MHN monthly e-newsletter are provided to employees and family members as needed following return of employee.
 - Re-integration issues are addressed by providing information, emotional support, guidance and referral to employees and family members. A short DVD on re-integration of the family has been developed and will be made available to Community Liaison Offices and posted as a video clip on the MHN website.
 - Noontime Networking lunches are held on a monthly basis (third Wednesday of the month, in HST cafeteria) open to employees, tandems and adult family members experiencing (past, present or future) an unaccompanied or separated tour.
 - HomeFront US, an invitation-only listserv, is available to family members; 'veterans' are encouraged to remain as resource persons. The same is true of the Directory of UT families. (FLO)

All employees and their family members contemplating an unaccompanied tour are encouraged to learn more about the support services and resources provided by the Department. Please contact each office with questions about the programs and services available.

Contact information:

FLQaskUT@state.gov; HR-ER@state.gov; MedECS@state.gov; OCA@state.gov;

<http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/prd/hrweb/cda/index.html> (Intranet)

<http://www.state.gov/m/fsi/tc/> (Internet)

<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c14521.htm> (Internet)