

Placement service for nannies grows as parents seek options to day care

By Linda Kirby
Nannies. The term conjures up a vision of an affectionate, petticoated woman with her arms lovingly around a happy brood of children.

They are the offspring of wealthy parents and all reside contently in a mansion of sorts. She is devoted to these children—they are her life. She is best friend and mother wrapped up in one and they adore her.

Well, nannies don't wear petticoats anymore, nor are they likely to resemble Julie Andrews in "The Sound of Music."

One look at current statistics on the demand for these paraprofessional mothers indicates the business is a booming concern.

Every year an estimated 5,000 domestics from around the world are brought into Ontario alone, and according to Gladys Drever, president of Mississauga based Canadian Maid, the demand for nannies continues to grow.

Nannies, according to Mrs. Drever, are no longer an exclusive luxury for the rich but a suitable and economical alternative to other forms of daycare.

The idea for "Canadian Maid" was born five years ago when she was working for a large and successful personnel agency as a placement officer.

A single mother, she enrolled her four-year-old son in a daycare program, but she was concerned her child was not receiving sufficient personal care.

The idea of starting up her own company and hiring nannies for local families grew as she realized that many other parents had similar concerns about daycare services.

In the fall of 1979, she quit her well-paying job to work as her own boss and for six months existed on next to no income as she struggled to get the nanny venture off the ground.

Today, she hires, on the average, a dozen new girls every month from Greece, Spain, Italy, England, The Philippines and Jamaica.

In the past two years, she has placed more than 200 girls, with the help of full-time employees stationed around the world whose sole task is to interview and select the girls.

Mrs. Drever works out of an office in her home where she interviews prospective clients.

Her agency requires little advertising. More than half of her business comes through referrals from happy customers.

"The demand for nannies is there. People are looking for someone who is always going to be with the children," she explained.

"If you are late, you don't have to worry about the children. You know someone is with them."

Day care may cost only \$60 or \$75 per child, but when a family is looking at two or three children, the expense is considerable. The cost of hiring a nanny however is approximately \$82 per week, plus room and board, whether the family has one or several children.

In addition to caring for the children, nannies perform light household duties including laundry and cooking. Their day usually begins at 7 a.m. with breakfast chores.

The morning is spent tidying the home and afternoon hours with the children.

Once the evening meal is cleared the nanny has her own time. Most are given the weekend off or alternate days during the week.

While the idea of recruiting a girl sounds simple enough, the process involved in finding a suitable girl and bringing her from another country is not so easy, admitted Mrs. Drever.

When a girl is interviewed, she must provide at least two letters of recommendation, as well as filling out an application form.

She must have an up to date health certificate and be clear of any criminal record.

Mrs. Drever also requests a handwritten letter from the girl with her reason for applying.

Many of her contacts will interview as many as 30 girls every day, five days a week, particularly in countries where young women are looking for an opportunity to come to Canada.

Depending upon the country, the process of bringing a girl over may take anywhere from two to four months and in some cases it is longer.

The employer has only to visit a Manpower office in Toronto and sign a job offer. The rest



Helping with chores. Lisa and Chris Colbeck help Mary McNally with the dinner table preparations. Nannies are not just servants, but more like family members in most cases according to Gladys Drever, president of Canadian Maid. Approximately 15 per cent of requests for nannies are for single parent homes such as in this Milton household, said Mrs. Drever.

of the paper work is looked after by Mrs. Drever and her counterpart in the foreign country.

Most girls pay for their own trip over. In some cases they are helped out by the prospective employer who later deducts the cost of the trip from the nanny's earnings at an agreed rate.

Mrs. Drever's fee for finding the right girl is \$400, and she does not feel her service is overpriced.

"I guarantee the goods to both parties. If there is a personality problem, we will sort it out," she said.

A girl is never left out of a job or to fend for herself, she said, adding that too many agencies wipe their hands clean of the girls once they are placed.

She has heard a few bad stories of girls fired for one reason or another and literally booted out of the house. If that should happen, "the girls have my private number so they can reach me whenever, even if it is the middle of the night," Mrs. Drever said, adding this has never happened with one of her clients.

In only two cases, girls have returned home. One young woman was too homesick to be happy here and the second girl was picked up for shoplifting.

Mrs. Drever prides herself with choosing girls who work out well with a family and become almost a family member rather than "just a nanny."

All nannies hired have a good working knowledge of English. Many, such as Filipinos also have nursing or teaching qualifications.

The ages of the nannies varies and often depends on a client's preference.

English girls are among the youngest, said Mrs. Drever. Usually in their late teens, they are looking for a chance to live in Canada for a year or two.

Filipinos however, are often over 25 years old and are looking for a long term position that will last as long as possible.

Many return to their home once their visa is up and re-apply to come back to Canada, she said.

Mrs. Drever specializes in hiring Filipino women because they are the most popular, she said. "Most come from very large families and are extremely affectionate with children," she said, describing them as shy, mild and meek people, but with very special traits, as each nationality has its own characteristics.

"English girls are younger, bubbly, outgoing and independent," she said. "The Spanish tend to be a little domineering and in many cases run the home for the family."

"Italians are very much like the Filipinos—shy and quiet, but affectionate and very protective of the children. Greeks are like the English in personality, but more attentive to housework details.

"Clients generally choose what their friends have employed," said Mrs. Drever but the main object is always to find a nanny who will be compatible with a family.

As much as she takes pains to find the right girl for a family, Mrs. Drever also looks out for the nanny's best interests.

"I had one couple who requested a nanny and I turned them down. The wife was the sweetest person you would ever want to meet, but the husband—it seemed he had a bad temper."

In another case a single mother with five children was living in a basement apartment and Mrs. Drever did not feel this was a suitable living arrangement for a nanny.

"You have to be careful that the clients are going to provide a good home," she said.

She has placed nannies with single fathers as well, but this is done with considerable care to avoid any problems.

The bulk of her clients are basic, middle-class families, usually double-income homes.

"I have one family where both the husband and wife are factory workers," said Mrs. Drever, but she also caters to the Forest Hill and Bridle Path elite in north Toronto.

Approximately 60 per cent of her business centres in Mississauga with Brampton and Milton coming next in line. She also places nannies as far east as Oshawa and as far west as Guelph.

While the pay is not high, nannies do enjoy a few extra benefits, she said.

"The girls are more comfortable when they are treated as a member of the family and not just as a servant, and most are like family," said Mrs. Drever. "Many are very generous to their nanny. They will usually supply some winter clothing, if the girl does not have any."

"They will buy them little things to show their appreciation, and if there is a trip south for the family, the nanny is taken along at no cost to her."

As a service to nannies, Mrs. Drever puts the girls in touch with each other and arranges a couple of parties each year.

Mrs. Drever considers her new business a success story and hopes to open other offices in the future, but for now, she has other plans.

She recently married and is thinking of adding to the family and admits one of the first things she must do, (as she expects to carry on her business) will be to hire a nanny.



A pretty happy trio. Irish nanny Mary McNally and her two charges Chris Colbeck 11, and sister Lisa, 13 are all pretty good pals. She is up in the morning to help them get off to school and there when they get home. Nannies are often a suitable and economical alternative to other points of day care.

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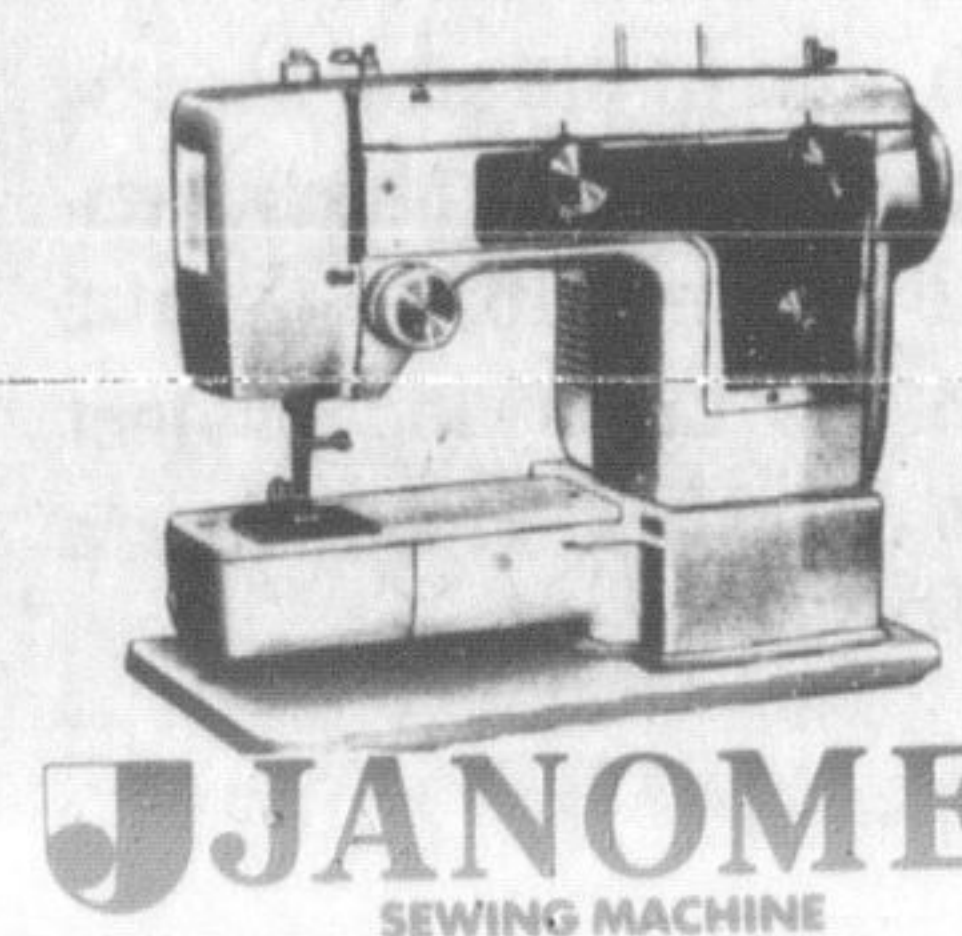
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