College strains to fill demand for home care

People who enjoy children and travel, and who would like flexibility in their work situation or where they might like to locate, should consider Malaspina College's nanny/child care program, says coordinator Sharon Dunnigan.

The program is unique, according to Dunnigan, because it is designed to train people to work in home care rather than institutional settings.

One of only two nanny programs offered in Canada in a college setting, Malaspina’s program is playing to the increasing awareness of the nanny concept developing in the country.

"Nannies have two basic options," Dunnigan says. "Some prefer a live-in situation, which usually provides an inexpensive room and board in an attractive setting, while others prefer to be independent and live out."

Twenty weeks in length, the program gives participants both a credential to use in applying for jobs and many useful life-skills they will find valuable in their own families.

During the 20 weeks, students balance theory with practicums giving a variety of experiences, in nursery school, kindergarten and family day care, as well as two practicums of four weeks each in two different home placements.

"All this experience is supervised and evaluated," Dunnigan notes, "to see how effectively students are putting into practice what they have learned about child development and care, nutrition, and play. The program also covers related skills such as communication techniques, household management, and employer-employee relations.

Job possibilities for those coming out of the program are excellent. A survey of help-wanted ads in the Vancouver Sun, Province and Victoria Times-Colonist on one day showed 29 available positions.

Dunnigan attributes the demand to parents increasingly looking for quality care for their children.

"The days when working parents were happy with a babysitter who came in, opened a box of chocolates, and turned on the TV to entertain the kids are over. The nanny is a professional who has spent five months at college learning the skills required to manage a home and care for children."

Dunnigan is enthusiastic about travel opportunities available to trained nannies. Jobs overseas can be located either through the network of nanny agencies in England or other countries or by responding directly to classified ads in newspapers or magazines such as The Lady, which in a recent issue listed jobs in many parts of England as well as in exotic locations such as Athens, Paris, Geneva, Brussels and Bonn.

"These jobs are a unique way for someone to spend an extended period overseas experiencing another culture," Dunnigan says. "They usually sign a contract for a set period of time, so their situation is quite secure and they can make additional travel plans."

Dunnigan estimates that locally there are at least 10 jobs for every graduate from the nanny program.

The next nanny/child care class will begin Feb. 16. Canada Employment and Immigration will sponsor applicants who qualify, but fee-paying students will also be accepted.

Students must be 18 or older, bondable and have a valid driver’s licence and means of transportation, and letters of reference. Non-smokers are preferred.

At the moment students in the program range from 18 to 50 in age. Two current students are married women with children who already have jobs and will take their children to work with them when they graduate.

Those interested in applying should call Kathy Rovere at Malaspina, 753-3245. She would also like to hear from families who would be interested in having student nannies in their homes on a daily basis for the practicum period.

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"People write us asking for nannies, and we also receive an average of two or three calls per day. Some of our graduates have jobs in Nanaimo while others have chosen positions in Vancouver, Victoria, and Toronto," she says.