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Dorinda's trip to Vietnam: the new law

After many months of anticipation on all sides – both positive and negative – the new adoption law passed by vote of the National Assembly on June 18, 2010. It will go into effect on January 1, 2011, but other than that fact, details of the law remain unknown. On June 15, I met with Mr. Nguyen Van Binh, Director of the Department of Adoption of the Ministry of Justice. What I will report here stems from that conversation as well as from information culled from other sources which I have considered reliable.

First of all, changes from the “old” law, while significant, are NOT threatening for the future of international adoption. Vietnam remains committed to placing children internationally. However, consistent with the requirements of the Hague Convention, there will be a new effort to also find families nationally to adopt children. One of the principal changes from the old law, then, is that in comparison with the current two month wait while a search is done for birthmother and for a local family to adopt a child, that search will be extended to five months – 1 month for the search for the birthmother (if the child is abandoned), 2 months search for a local adoptive family within the province, and then a two month search for a Vietnamese adoptive family through a newly created national database. That is, families in Vietnam wishing to adopt a child may register on a national database for adoptive families, and may also search the database for children who will be placed there after the provincial search. It effectively means that no children under the age of 4 months will be proposed for international adoption. What remains to be seen is what kind of response there will be in the Vietnamese public to this new technology. The approach to national adoption has been more direct and “hands on”, with many adoptions happening through the local hospitals or directly with the orphanages, or even directly between families, and this will in all likelihood continue to happen. Those children never reach the roster of children offered in international adoption. The law provides a new avenue for Vietnamese adoptive parents to receive a child.

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Vietnam: adoption program

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Statistics: 2nd Quarter - 2010

There have been 5 proposals to Ontario* families between April 1 and June 30, 2010, including 3 boys and 2 girls. In addition to this there was one relative adoption. 3 children were from Vung Tau and 2 from Hoa Binh. None of these children were older or had special needs. Most of the referrals made in this period were to families whose Ministry Approval was received in the spring/early summer, 2008.

18 families departed on their adoption trip in the first 6 months of 2010.

*includes families in other provinces except Quebec

The New Law: cont'd

The practical impact of this aspect of the law is that it is unlikely that any children will be proposed during the first 4 or 5 months of 2011, as all new children will submit to this process. Any children proposed up to the end of December, 2010 will fall under the old law, and we will work, of course, to have as many child proposals as possible within the next five months.

Regarding other changes to be implemented is the matching process. It seems that the matching will continue to happen at the provincial level, under the supervision of the provincial Departments of Justice. Orphanages must report to the Department of Adoption (Hanoi) all children available for adoption. The Department of Adoption will then send to the provincial Justice Department a number of registered dossiers roughly similar to the number of children available for adoption. It seems to me that this is not hugely different from the current process. The only worrisome question is which dossiers are to be sent. Will the Department of Adoption respect the current agreements that agencies have with particular provinces (for us, Vung Tau, Tra Vinh, Hoa Binh, etc), and send only dossiers from those agencies to those provinces, or will there be a randomization of dossiers from all agencies? We are obviously hoping for the former scenario.

There is talk about an amount of money that will be paid to the Department of Adoption to be sent in place of the orphanage donation to the orphanage/social affairs department. At this point, no one knows how this will work.

In fact, while the changes in the law itself are not major changes, the way in which the changes will be implemented and interpreted will be determined over the next months in the decrees and circulars which will instruct all the players as to how to proceed in order to conform to the new law. We will let you know as these decrees and circulars are issued.

I also discussed the issues of single and older parents with Mr. Binh. The good news is that there is no intention to close Vietnam to single or older parents, although the new law specifies that parents over 60 will only be

considered for children 6 and over (no information yet as to what this means in the case of one parent over 60 and the other under 60). Mr. Binh did suggest that the Department favored that a child have a two-parent family, but they were willing to consider each case on an individual basis. As we have done in the past, we will continue to maintain a ratio of about 25% single parents to 75% couples. We also consider it important to maintain the ratio of child proposals at all times to a maximum of 1 single parent to every 2 couples (meaning that if a group of 5 single parent dossiers are next in line for proposals, we may have to delay the proposals to intersperse couple dossiers among them). I know this is disappointing to those who may be close to receiving a proposal, but we hope you will understand that it is important to do this if we are to maintain a good image and relationship with the Department of adoption. We would prefer this slight delay to one day being told that single adoptions will be severely limited or stopped.

Finally, there is the issue of the Hague Convention. Signature of the Hague Convention requires only the decision of the Cabinet and the Prime Minister, and it is expected that this will also happen within the next months. However, a two step process is involved in becoming a Hague country, the second being ratification. This is the step that is the most time-consuming, and it often takes several years before ratification takes place. It is not known at this point how long this process will take in Vietnam.

I hope this gives you an overview of where things are regarding the Vietnam process. As I have explained above, it is not a signal for despair, and Mr. Binh himself expressed the hope that people would greet the changes with equanimity, and be patient as the transition is effected. On a very positive side, we all hope that this will assure receiving countries of Vietnam's commitment to ethical and transparent adoptions, and change some of the negative perceptions promoted by the ISS report of last year.

Dorinda Cavanaugh (dorinda@tdh.ca)

Vung Tau 3: gala fundraising delivery

This year's gala targeted Vung Tau 3 as the primary recipient of the funds raised. It was my great pleasure to be part of bringing the materials to this orphanage. We spent the morning shopping for TV's, computers, fridges and dryers, bicycles and riding toys for the younger children. In the afternoon, we were able to deliver the computers, and were present for the delivery and the other major appliances. Unfortunately, despite the 40+ degree heat, there was no electricity, so the pleasure of turning on TV's and computers had to be postponed to the next day. At the end of the afternoon, to the delight of all the kids at the orphanage, the bicycles and riding toys arrived. Wonderful chaos ensued as the kids unloaded the bicycles and began to ride around the grounds of the orphanage and the surrounding streets. The little ones got on the riding toys in two's and three's, and the sounds of races and squeals of laughter could be heard in every corner. Great fun! See more photos at:

<http://tdhgalaauction2010.blogspot.com/>

The training courses for the nannies began on the following Saturday, and will continue on a regular basis during the next months.

The last part of the funding is in reserve for the remodeling of the baby washing area. We are looking for some idea as to how best reconstruct this area – with a sink and dressing/changing area, cupboards for clothes, diapers, and towels, appropriate lighting, and perhaps an area for preparation of bottles. If you are an architect or designer or have any talents in this area, we would greatly appreciate your input.

Dorinda Cavanaugh (dorinda@tdh.ca)

Over \$25 000 was raised for Vung Tau 3 at the Toronto Gala. It was a great success and the fundraising team would like to thank all who participated and attended!



Program Updates:

Ukraine

Many children over 6 years of age are waiting to be adopted in Ukraine as well as some younger children. For older children, once your documents are filed you travel within 3 months to Ukraine where you receive several child cases to review. This is a great program to explore!

Ecuador

TDH Ontario continues to await a response to our application for accreditation from Ecuador.

Honduras

This program continues to accept applications from families, including, but not limited to, for special needs. Children available for adoption are usually 1 year or older for couples younger than 40 years, 30 months and up for couples older than 40 years and 4 years and older for couples between 45 and 50 years old. Sibling groups are also available.

For more information on any program please contact:

Manon Parent (manon@tdh.ca)

Presentation to Parents ... a report on the Gala gathering

April 9, 2010

Compiled by Brendan Cavanaugh (brendan@tdh.ca)

Please note that this session took place in April. Some of the events remarked on as upcoming in this piece have occurred and are covered in the previous article.

In a corner of the elegant foyer of Le Jardin Event Center, in Vaughan, next to the massive marble fireplace with its fifteen foot mirror, the TDH Ontario Gala organizer, Christine Morra, had arranged a cluster of about twenty chairs, facing two more chairs: one for Dorinda Cavanaugh, Director of TDH Ontario, and one for Manon Parent, Program Coordinator from the TDH Ontario office in Vankleek Hill, Ontario.

This arrangement was TDH's response to a request that Dorinda be available for a Q & A at the Gala. Scheduled to start at 5:00 and go until 6:00, at 5:10 there was only one person in the audience. The session began with Dorinda giving a casual review of several topics previously mentioned in the TDH Ontario Quarterly Newsletter. At 5:20 there were twelve and eighteen at 5:30. At 10 to 6 there were 40 people sitting and standing around listening to Dorinda with interest.

WAITING LIST

Dorinda began by talking about the "Waiting List" Presently 60 people are in the preliminary pre-wait-list group, i.e. waiting for a place on the primary waiting list. We have 70 on the primary list of people who have their home-studies done, their dossiers completed and sent to Vietnam, and who are in line waiting for a proposal. At this point, they are looking at a two-year wait. We are trying to move that list forward.

With the new procedures there has to be a warning that the wait-time may lengthen. The wait-time in China has gotten longer; most countries are slowing down; the children that are being offered are special needs or older children. Increased waiting-time is the general character of international adoption today.

We do not want to accept dossiers and then have to tell people that they will be waiting for several years. The length of time people have to wait is a major problem. People ask, what else can we do? The answer is, not a lot, because the source of the delay is beyond your control, but we at the TDH Ontario office are trying to balance the various factors within our control so the wait-time is not more than three years.

For us there is only one waiting list. It comprises all the people in line waiting for a proposal to receive a child. On that list we indicate the basic variables: i.e., we list your preference for a child as determined by the homestudy, e.g. a child no older than 12 months, a child 3 to 5, etc. First we will look at the list in terms of the children who are presented to us as available for adoption, then we try to match up a parent who wants a child with certain characteristics and have been approved for that child. It is important to know that, at this point, the more flexible you can be with specific characteristics of the child you wish to adopt, the more likely it is that a child will be presented to us who matches your specifications.

CHANGING PARAMETERS: SPECIAL NEEDS

We do not know the future any more than you do. Most children we get are normal healthy babies, but we are starting to get more 'special needs' children. In the context of our Vietnam program the term does not mean a life-time care situation. Usually it means some small medical condition that can be repaired in Canada as soon as the child arrives here. We have said we will not take emotional or mentally handicapped children, we only accept physical handicaps. We have tried to strike a realistic balance between the needs of adoptive parents and the policies of Vietnam and the needs of the children who are presented to us. Note that what is 'special needs' to one person may not be to another. For example, a cleft palette is a major issue for a child in Vietnam but it is a very small problem for us to fix here in Canada. Remember, you must have written home-study approval for a special needs child.

SIGNING OF VIETNAM'S NEW ADOPTION LAW

The New Adoption Law in Vietnam is another issue. There are many rumours about this law; at this point they are only rumours. Realistically speaking here is what is about to happen. Vietnam will change its law because it wants to be in compliance with the Hague Convention. It was discussed in 2009 and presented to the Vietnamese legislature in November. Then it was sent back for modification. In May it will be submitted to the legislature again and either accepted as written or sent back again for revision. Having said that, we have heard that common opinion is that the New Law will be accepted when it is resubmitted.

VIETNAM'S NEW ADOPTION LAW:

FIRST POINT: PRESCRIBED PROTOCOL

About the New Adoption Law itself, I have read the draft. The differences are not major. For example, one of the changes adds one more month during which the child will be offered for adoption nationally. It may not be in the best interest of the children to be institutionalized for even a longer time during this critical period of developmental formation, but it is in keeping with the way the Hague Convention sees the adoption process. Currently, there is one month during which a notice is publicized seeking the birth parents; then a month to search for local adoptive parents in the province. The new law says there will be a third month during which there will be a national Vietnamese search for potential adoptive parents for that child. Vietnam intends to develop a new database of adoptable Vietnamese children so that any Vietnamese interested in adopting can look through it. There will also be a database of potential Vietnamese adoptive parents, and they will be notified of any child being offered. All this follows the Hague perspective that all possible means of having adoptable children remain in the country of their birth are first explored.

SIGNING THE HAGUE CONVENTION

It is also rumoured that the Hague Convention will be signed. Frankly, that is not likely to happen immediately. Signing the Convention is not a simple process. The first step is to align a country's laws to be in step with the Hague

propositions. A number of issues have to be discussed and decisions have to be made regarding the new law and its application. The next step will be to set a date on which the new law will be in force. We think that date will be January, 2011. After that joining the Hague Convention, is a process. In the US and Canada it took several years to accept the convention.

THE ISS REPORT

You may have heard about the report presented to Vietnam but written by the International Social Service (ISS). It is often mistakenly identified as the 'UNICEF report'. The report has been seriously discredited but it still is influential. It pushes strongly national adoptions. We are not opposed to that in principle, but there are very few people in Vietnam who are prepared to adopt a child. Culturally, it is a last resort of a couple who have no children. It would be unusual, but they might be willing to adopt a child, however, they would keep that fact a secret, like it used to be here.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Unfortunately in Vietnam there is no social service to provide preparation or protocol guidance for adoption. The Vietnamese family simply walks into an orphanage, looks at a baby and perhaps asks their fortune-teller if the baby matches them astrologically. At this point, that is still the culture.

The New Law stipulates the requirements for the application or registration of Vietnamese people to adopt a child. There is a form to fill out, asking for their passport or ID, a judicial record, a marriage certificate, a health certificate, an attestation of their moral character from someone in their village, and a recommendation by the People's Committee. These are all valid requirements but the list does not include anything like a home-study because currently in Vietnam there is no such service.

From the Western perspective, the more difficult policy to be comfortable with is the essentially temporary character of Vietnamese adoption. Article 25 makes it clear that any adoption can be terminated because the parents decide to terminate it, for example, because they no longer want the child or the child no longer wants them. They can send the child back to the orphanage if they come to consider the child a health, financial, or social liability or if they suffer a loss of their own resources. They also are free to send the child back if the child should pose any sort of threat, or becomes a source of dishonour to the family or is guilty of destroying property.

National adoption in Vietnam is not based on the same cultural assumption as adoption in the West. Culturally, the Vietnamese people are not ready to look at an adoption the same way that Westerners do. The Vietnamese have their own cultural and social history; their attitude towards adoption has to be understood against their own culture. The best the West can do is present some of the development in Western culture about adoption for them to consider.

VIETNAM'S NEW LAW: SECOND NEW POINT

The second major difference stemming from the New Law is that there will be a Committee for Child Proposals. I first thought it was going to be centralized, but it turns out that in

the draft of the new law that I have read that is not the case. Local committees will be designated by the People's Committee of the province. The opinion is that the actual - protocol will not really change much, that is, recommendation from us and the orphanage will be made to the local committee. It is thought that this new formula will become a normal process not much different from the present one.

VIETNAM'S NEW LAW: THIRD NEW POINT

The third issue has to do with the time of the proposal. The investigation regarding whatever there is of your child's background will now be done before the child is proposed to the parents. That change will eliminate a particularly stressful element of anxiety for waiting parents.

VIETNAM'S NEW LAW: FOURTH POINT

The fourth issue concerns the trip itself. It is extremely difficult to estimate when you can go to Vietnam. The current head of the Department of International Adoption (DIA) in Vietnam has adopted a very different approach than his predecessor. He makes decisions regarding adoption cases which no one can be prepared for. They are sometimes highly individualistic. The last part of the adoption process is that the child's adoption dossier, which has been cleared by the province, is sent to the DA. The DA must satisfy themselves that everything they want is there. We are hoping that this step will take one to two weeks for the head of the DA to sign off on individual cases. It is only after that happens that the parent's dossier will be sent to the province. After all that transfer of signed and stamped papers is complete; only then will a date be given for the adoption ceremony.

VIETNAM'S NEW LAW: DOCUMENTATION SEQUENCING

A new wrinkle is that the Letter of Non-objection has to be issued before the child dossier approval for the adoptive parents will be signed. With all of that being done, it should not take more than two weeks until the ceremony. At that point, you can go early, if you want. Many people say they want to do that, especially in provinces where you are allowed to have the baby with you as soon as you get there. Many parents see that arrangement as a positive opportunity to begin bonding with their child and, at the same time, to get some idea of the child's circumstances.

The other option is to wait until everything is done. You go to Vietnam, the ceremony is the next day or so and you can come home. In terms of time this option is usually the most secure. And that option suits a number of people as well.

CANADIAN EMBASSY: TRYING TO MAKE THINGS GO FASTER

Our experience to date with the Canadian Embassy has been nothing short of extraordinary. Visas and confirmation of Canadian citizenship are usually issued within days. Recently, because of some parents who have tried to pressure the Embassy to give special consideration, the Embassy has warned that the adoption process in Vietnam can take up to a month and parents should be prepared to stay as long. This hasn't been our experience, but you are advised to consider this a possibility, and one over which we have no control.

GALA GATHERING Q & A

QUESTION: We have completed our home study and contacted Manon. We understand the Ministry will take about 12 weeks to review the file. When will we go on the list?

ANSWER: When the Ministry sends the letter of approval to the TDH Ontario office then, and then only you go on the list.

QUESTION: Is it true that the time from the proposal to the time of travel is longer in the North than in the South?

ANSWER: That used to be the case. But these days it has evened out. Both the North and the South have a wait-time of 4 to 7 months, that is, assuming there are no particular snags such as an unexpected demand from the DIA or some problem with the child's health.

QUESTION: Is it true that there is a two-year wait from the time your dossier is sent to Vietnam before you travel to Vietnam.

ANSWER: Yes, two to two and a half years is the general wait-time period today, in April 2010.

QUESTION: Will the fact that the child is a 'special needs' child have an impact on proposal and travel wait-time?

ANSWER: That depends: if Vietnam recognizes the child's condition as a 'special need', then it is possible, but in no sense certain, that they may eliminate the wait-time of the first part of the process. So it might be a little faster. But what Vietnam considers 'special needs' and what you as Western adoptive parents consider 'special needs' is not necessarily the same. For example, Vietnam does not consider Hepatitis B or C as a special need because so many people in Vietnam are carriers. Children who present with uncertain medicals might be classed as 'special needs'. The label of 'special needs' has to be discussed in each case.

QUESTION: What is the general frequency of proposals from Vietnam?

ANSWER: In the last six months, we have had 10 proposals. But there were almost none in March. It is difficult to look at the small numbers and see flow patterns. However, we can say that the flow of proposals seems to go in surges, and we usually receive about 35 children per year.

QUESTION: Are there more 'special needs' children available in Vietnam?

ANSWER: There are no more 'special needs' children in Vietnam than in most other sending countries. What has changed is the public awareness of this category of child. A number of speculative reasons have been advanced to explain the rise of that awareness, but no one seems to know exactly why it has happened – perhaps the reasons are subtle – but we do not know that the phenomenon is real; "yes" world-wide children with 'special needs' have risen into the awareness of their country's governments. It is not a phenomenon particular to Vietnam, it is a spreading attitude. We have little choice but to accept it; so we do. We have publically said we are open to receiving children with 'special needs' and we have the track record to prove that we have done so with great success. Due to the tentative character of our early relationship with Ho Chi Minh, our early agreement with Ho Chi Minh was to adopt only special needs children, but we have just gotten a broader mandate in our license.

QUESTION: How many 'special needs' children have been adopted through TDH.

ANSWER: I do not know exactly; that is really difficult to say. The category of special needs children has risen into awareness only gradually. As I have already pointed out the designation of 'special needs' differs between Vietnam and Canada. But perhaps the number approaches 50.

QUESTION: Why was it that we could only adopt special needs in Ho Chi Minh (HCM)?

ANSWER: The principal was both practical and strategic. Establishing a functional relationship with an orphanage is a delicate matter and we had to proceed with the opportunities provided to us. We could only adopt 'special needs' children from HCM because at the time we did not have a license to adopt from that orphanage. But the law stated that we could adopt 'special needs' children from anywhere without a general license. We took advantage of that law for the sake of those children with the agreement of the parents who adopted them. It was a win-win situation. It was certainly in the best interest of the children – whose lives were often saved by being adopted and cared for in Canada; and it was in the best interest of those parents who were compassionate enough to be able to accept that they would not only adopt a child but would be willing to and be in a position to provide the extra care that the special need requires.

QUESTION: We have had one successful proposal and adoption from Ben Tre. The second proposal has taken an inordinately long time. Why is that the case?

ANSWER: We probably will not continue to work there because of the way Ben Tre's attitude has developed. We have no inside information as to why the attitude has changed at Ben Tre. It is common knowledge that such changes in human affairs usually are traceable back to one individual, sometimes to one particular event. But the fact is that Ben Tre's attitude towards international adoption and the effects on its processing are quite discouraging. So, as I said, we will probably not continue to work there.

Question: Are there other provinces with a negative attitude towards adoption as in Ben Tre?

ANSWER: The circumstances of each orphanage are unique. No common answer is possible. But after many years of a successful program, we no longer get many children from Quang Ninh. We have three this year from Hoa Binh, but it is difficult to determine what that means statistically. From Tra Vinh we have about 7, and now we have these few from HCM. Currently – and remember this pattern changes from time to time – most of our children come from Vung Tau.

QUESTION: What are the numbers from HCM?

ANSWER: Maybe we have received about 10 children from HCM. Note that the Ontario Ministry has insisted that they approve a Vietnam province themselves. That means that they will check with the Canadian Embassy to ask if the Embassy considers it a good province.

QUESTION: Because other countries are closing in Vietnam, will TDH get more proposals?

Answer: Really, it does not work that way. The well-intentioned effort to make such a simplistic, mechanistic analysis of an adoption program is inappropriate. The practice of international adoption is just too complicated to be reduced to mere numbers. But the answer is: Probably not. Canada is not the only country trying to run adoption programs. While it is true that Sweden and Ireland have withdrawn their adoption program from Vietnam, both cases have their own unique story; other countries have stepped in, such as the Spain, Italy, and France, all of which have extensive adoption programs in Vietnam.

END OF THE SESSION

Dorinda thanked everyone for participating and indicated that she was there at the Gala and would be available to anyone who wanted to talk to her.

Water Buffalo Project – your \$500 really changes lives!

June 2010 - The temperature is 44 degrees. We sit in a (blessedly) air conditioned 4wd to traverse the dirt roads leading away from Hoa Binh city, roads which at times are barely passable. In about an hour, we reach a point where the car can go no further, and begin the 20 minute walk through the mountains to reach a small house where the recipients of one buffalo live. There are five children and three adults living in a single room dwelling which serves as bedroom, kitchen, living room, shed. There are no services here - no running water (a well is probably a two-hour walk away, or perhaps 30 minutes by motorbike), no electricity, no "stores", no gas. As we walk, we consider the hardship of mere survival here. The family tells us they grow rice, cut manioc, gather wood all year, and their income is about \$1500 for the year. The water



buffalo will improve their lives immeasurably - their rice harvest will increase by a factor of 4, they will be able to lend their buffalo to their neighbors, transport of water and harvest will be made easier.

TDH has provided 28 water buffalos to the poorest families of Hoa Binh province. Three thus far have had offspring. The orphanage tells us that families approach them weekly to beg to be considered for this program. It is highly successful and very much appreciated at every level.

The direction of the program is in the hands of the orphanage, which receives recommendations from the local People's Committees and then distributes the available animals across the province. Families wishing to be considered are asked to fill out a request form, but the village chief in each community

knows the needs of the individual families and makes the final recommendation for this or other available programs (food, housing) for the poor. TDH is the sole source of funding for the water buffalo project. Two social workers from the orphanage go with the family to purchase the water buffalo and bring it back to the house, and follow up on the care of the animal and the improvement in the life of the family.

On our second day in Hoa Binh, we visited two more families - a single mother who is ill and has NO income or land to provide for herself and her 10 year old son. She relies on the government to give her a little food each month. The second family was a group of 8 persons in three generations living in a small house. Despite their meager circumstances, it was evident that the family functioned well together and had the energy and enthusiasm to make this donation make a difference in their lives. I look forward to seeing them again.

Over time, each of these families will be able to breed their buffalo, with the further income providing increased stability and opportunity for their family and community. One small water buffalo can make a huge difference!

Interesting factoid: in Vietnam, only dogs are named as pets. Cat, birds and other animals are not, and this applies to water buffalos as well. So no Minou's, Tweety's, or Elsie's in Vietnam!



Dorinda Cavanaugh (dorinda@tdh.ca)

MISSION TO KONTUM...student reflections

The fifteen-year old students who accompanied Dorinda to Vietnam for three and a half weeks in late 2009/early 2010 speak on their humanitarian trip in aid of the private orphanages in Kontum. These orphanages are run solely by a group of Canonesses, (Catholic Sisters who live together and work in the world rather than being cloistered away), without any government funding. Shortly before the students' trip, the area had been fiercely hit by a typhoon. Their mission was to help restore normal life in the orphanages, working alongside the nuns and orphans, as well as to provide some fun and levity for the children.

Through 'Project Second Suitcase' each student was in charge of filling and bringing an additional suitcase with necessities (clothing, medicines, diapers, games, etc.) for the orphanages. Through regular meetings over a period of seven months they got to know each other, delegated responsibilities and prepared for their trip. They also attended a leadership camp.



'During the preparation I developed several skills and values that I never suspected even to possess. I have a rather calm personality; it is rare that I really talk about my opinions and my ideas. Through this project I developed this ability, and more often, finally **dared to speak and say what I thought.**' KATHERINE

'The poverty surrounding us in rural KonTum was something we are not used to. Of course, just our presence in Asia and absorption of a new culture left us curious. We were giants in a different world. It was a wonderful adventure with many discoveries. For example, the food! More importantly, our **realization that the orphans were absolutely content despite their material poverty was and always will be a revelation** for us Westerners. Lastly, none of us came back the same person and we are immensely grateful for this experience.' VIRGINIE

'This project has been great for us all and we all came back more mature. We loved the experience. Among other things, making the children happy with easy smiles and small gestures was really remarkable for us all. However, saying goodbye to the children knowing that we would maybe never see them again was really hard. Nevertheless, we **know that we brought comfort and love for a few days.** Each of us has discovered qualities inside ourselves that were hidden until then.' CATHERINE

'What I appreciate most is that the trip **opened my mind on what is essential in life.** The encounters that I had are invaluable to me. There weren't many obstacles to overcome, because our group was very easygoing. The only obstacle that comes to mind is probably here in Canada, not to fall back into old habits and not to forget what I experienced there,

continuing my life as if nothing had happened. In short, this trip brought me a lot, on various levels, and it was one of the most beautiful experiences I have ever lived.' VIRGINIE

'**I learned a lot about myself.** I saw what I was capable of and that my priorities were in the right place! Obviously, I learned a lot about the situation facing orphans in Vietnam. It **opened my eyes to the realities around us.** Quebec is not the whole world and my house is not the most important place! It is not just me that matters! I am more than lucky to have experienced this at my age and to have actually made concrete actions to try to change the world little by little through my activities!' KATHERINE

'With this trip, I really **developed my teamwork.** At the very beginning, we hardly knew each other. I was sure we would get closer, but this experience brought us much more than that. We are like one big family, really! During the entire trip, we were always there for each other, to support each other, help each other, and trust each other. I am extremely happy to have this experience with them.' KATHERINE

'The return to school and to reality was difficult. After seeing how these children lived in orphanages and return overnight to our luxury, it was difficult. Also, to catch up on all we missed is not easy! Life has continued even though we were not there! This part of our project has certainly **developed my independence and my sense of responsibility.**' KATHERINE

'Not many people on earth have the opportunity we had. It is not that we were lucky to have participated; we earned it with our hard work and determination. I am extremely proud of each member of the group and I managed to develop strong links with everyone. My aptitude to leadership has grown and it gave me a great deal of confidence. Many people wear a mask that prevents others from seeing their true nature. I used to be one of these people before **this project changed my life.**' ALEXIA

'Adaptation to poverty and then the return to normal life were very difficult for me. To see poverty so close and then to come back to a cushioned little world where nothing tough ever happens to us was a huge shock. We miss the children a lot, but we knew before hand that we were going to have this problem. Anyhow, I am convinced that **the whole group would be ready to go back immediately, as early as today.**' CATHERINE

Translated and adapted by:
Isabelle Cochelin and Sharon Kashino

Family Features: The Adoption of Nadia, Ukraine

After six weeks in Ukraine, we returned on September 23, 2009, with a pretty (and very active!) little four-year-old girl who has filled our lives with laughter and happiness. The Ukrainian court decision came into effect on September 14, the date we officially became parents. Since then, Nadia has adapted very quickly, is in excellent health, has made many friends at daycare and already speaks French well and a little English.



Kitchen helper, October, 2009

Upon our return, our daughter, Nadia, was seen by her paediatrician in Montréal, who found her as normal as can be. The doctor couldn't believe that this child lived all her life in an orphanage as she is perceptive, curious and sociable. Moreover, despite the prognosis from the doctor at Nadia's orphanage, she is in excellent health and does not require any medication or special treatment, except a lot of love and patience from us!

The Ukrainian adoption procedure took place exactly as described by our agency, Terre des Hommes pour les Enfants. Our Ukrainian adoption experience was very good in all respects and we were supported at every step by energetic and enthusiastic professionals here (from a distance) and in-country.

We strongly recommend TDH to any parent wishing to adopt a Ukrainian child. However, parents must be realistic about their expectations and have a good understanding of the subtleties and policies (legal and implied) governing international adoption in Ukraine.

Every day at Nadia's orphanage we saw many (too many) beautiful, intelligent and affectionate children, all wanting one thing: to be part of a family. Parents risk fewer health surprises adopting a so-called "older child" and paediatric care in the Ukraine is as good as anywhere, following a stringent and detailed European approach. At any rate, children in "perfect health" don't exist anywhere in the world—who can define "perfection" or "normalcy"? We would have been very suspicious of such a diagnosis. The Ukrainian children proposed for international adoption are generally in very good health but in some cases require minor corrective treatment for a special condition. These children have a reputation for being very intelligent and affectionate, and for integrating very quickly into their adoptive families in many different countries. Did I mention that the children we saw at the orphanage were among the most beautiful children in the world?



On the swing, April, 2010

Sibling groups of two or three are also quite common and are not separable under Ukrainian law.

Parents must not worry needlessly about adopting an "older" child, i.e., four to seven years or older. Human affection lives in all of us at every age—even "really old" people aged 70 and over sometimes fall in love with each other! Ukrainian orphanages provide excellent education and, with an older child, more can be known about their health, their personality, and if there will be "chemistry" with the adoptive family. These children are very organized as well as independent. The orphanages are places where strict discipline rules are imposed on all children. The self-discipline these children inevitably acquire is a direct result of this strictness.

We met couples from different countries who adopted children aged seven or ten, and we know that age has nothing to do with the integration of the child if he/she is surrounded by love and support. Without exception, all the couples we met in Ukraine adopted healthy and very affectionate children. One of these couples returned to adopt a boy after having adopted a girl from Ukraine two years ago. The girl returned with her family and adored her new little brother.

Adopting a child, for us, remains a gesture of the heart before being a rational decision; an intuitive and emotional act before being logical. True love has no explanation but none of us would be here today without it.

We would like to thank from the deepest of our hearts all the personnel at TDH pour les Enfants in Montreal, not only for their excellent work and professional support, but for having given us the courage to live this wonderful experience unique in a lifetime.

*Adrian Nisel & Maria Liana Necsa
adrian.nisel@gmail.com
translated by: Karen Mayer
adapted by: Adrian Nisel*

A Universal Language: Baby Massage



Our son's first language was Vietnamese. His world and our world were once separated by distance, heritage and culture – all to be shared and celebrated first and foremost through touch and massage.

As a parent of a beautiful boy, adopted from Vietnam, and as an Infant Massage Instructor having worked with many families and children with special needs, I encourage all adoptive parents to experience massage with their child. The benefits are numerous for both your child and you. Most importantly, massage – nurturing touch - can help break down barriers, bridge distance, heal and help unite. It is a universal language...one that ALL can learn.

Massage and Touch

Touch is the first sense to develop in utero. Research indicates that our sense of touch develops in the time frame of 6-9 weeks gestation. It is thus by its skin, first-born and most sensitive of its bodies, that babies learn about feelings, people and things. Skin is extraordinary. It is our most important and primary connection to the world. The need to be touched is considered to be essential to the harmonious development of a baby. "With human touch, the human infant not only survives but it thrives" (IAIM-Vimala McClure).

Today, countless research studies in the US and UK support the many benefits of infant massage with impressive results.

Vimala McClure, founder of the International Association of Infant Massage - present in 43 countries -, groups the benefits of baby massage into four main categories offering detailed information based on years of research, observation and experience and knowledge behind the beautiful art of massage.

Interaction: Massage promotes attachment and bonding by providing skin-to-skin touch and a nurturing experience between parent and infant. It provides a special individual time for communication that builds and communicates love, respect, tolerance and empathy. It helps baby feel heard, acknowledged and loved. Massage is a great way to get to know your child. It can help parents better understand and interpret their baby's physical cues and cries.

Stimulation: The sensory stimulation of touch promotes growth and development. It stimulates all systems (circulatory, digestive, immune, nervous, respiratory, hormonal, vestibular, lymphatic, sensory).

Resources:

Remember that your baby may react differently to touch. She/he may – at first - be receptive to it or may not. She/he may or may not be resistant and may or may not give you permission to touch and massage him/her. Your child's needs are unique. Listen to your child's cues, sounds and unspoken words. She/he will use various means to say that he/she is ready and available for massage. Remain attentive to her/his eyes, body and voice. Remember that massage can be adapted to benefit a child with special needs and that nurturing touch can happen before massage even begins.

- International Association of Infant Massage Canada. <http://www.iaim-aimbcanada.org>
- Vimala McClure. *Infant Massage, a handbook for loving parents*
- Touch Research Institute, Mailman Center for Child Development at the University of Miami, Miller School of Medicine, Miami Florida.
- Ashley Montagu. *La peau et le toucher, un premier langage*

Relaxation: Massage can help reduce stress levels and stress hormones, increase levels of relaxing or anti-stress hormones. It can also improve the ability to calm oneself and cope with increased environmental demands. It can help baby relax and let go of emotional stress and also help sleep longer.

Relief: Massage can help ease discomforts from gas, constipation, teething and congestion. It helps release tension and reduces physical and physiological tension.

Massage, Attachment & Adoption

As adoptive parents, children come into our lives at different ages. Like all parents, we want to ensure that they learn to feel safe and secure. We want them to learn to accept and experience healthy affection and attachment and most importantly feel connectedness to us.

Massage can help weave a strong bond between parents and children even when there may have been interruptions/ delays, such as adoption. Baby massage promotes attachment and bonding by providing skin-to-skin touch and a nurturing experience between parent and infant.

Our Story: His World and My World

Our son came home as a tiny yet determined 6 month old baby boy. He was very alert, anxious, made very few demands, had skin issues, experienced respiratory difficulties and treatments, had minor surgery and slept very little for a long period of time.

Now at age three, our son is expressive and remains the strong, determined and curious little boy we met in Vietnam. And more importantly, his connection to us – strong as we see and feel it – confirms that attachment can move mountains.

Did massage help? It did. Because of our son, his challenges and my experience as an adoptive parent, I have a stronger appreciation for the physical and emotional benefits of baby massage and an even bigger one for the benefits of building an emotional connection through touch.

Today, I not only believe massage has made a difference in our lives but I know that it has been beneficial for my son in many ways...more than studies could even begin to quantify.

Manon Salois (smilecan@hotmail.com)

Family Features: Manon Parent Blessing⁵



Manon Parent, TDH Ontario's Adoption Program Coordinator, has extensive experience as an adoptive and foster parent.

When I heard Manon's story, I couldn't stop thinking about the significance of the number five. Five is an important symbol to humankind, and the number of our fundamental virtues: wisdom, love, truth, goodness, justice. Five is also the number of points of a star, and every waiting or adoptive parent I know has wished upon a star for their child to come home. Manon's story is unusual because it is the story of the intention to adopt internationally being trumped by the unexpected needs of local children.

Manon's story offers a lesson about being open-minded as to how one's hopes and prayers might be answered. Manon wished to respond to the need of a foreign child for a set of parents but was presented with and responded to the needs of some very special local children for parenting. The choice she made points out the difference between holding out for a hoped-for planned future and responding to present but unexpected need. It is the difference between the strength of responding to the present with virtue and insisting on the possibility of a yet unfulfilled future wish. In Manon's case, her good intentions for the future and her warm-hearted response to the present magically worked together to make her dreams come true.

In 1989, after 10 years of marriage, Manon and her husband Kenny applied in their home province of Quebec to adopt a baby from Colombia. The mom-to-be wished upon her star for just one healthy baby; she didn't dare push her luck after experiencing the heartache of infertility. The couple waited anxiously for two years and were near the top of the list when Manon's sister in Ontario told her that families were wanted to adopt domestically in the Plantagenet area of Ontario.

Manon and Kenny contacted the local Ontario Children's Aid and were told about Christopher, a 10-month old boy born to a set of parents whose mental capacity was not adequate to support the difficult task of caring for children. For their safety, their three children had been removed from their home, a difficult experience for both the parents and the children. Christopher had been put in foster care right after birth, since the Social Workers had become familiar with the family's problems earlier when they had previously removed the two older siblings. The parents' damaged genes had been passed to the children, all of whom had some physical and developmental problems. Manon

and Kenny were fully informed about the family's situation and, undaunted, took the time to consider the baby's special needs. They both recognized that "no parent can expect a perfect child". In the generosity of their hearts they agreed to meet the baby.

The couple visited Christopher and fell instantly in love with him, whom Manon described as "perfect". Two weeks after the first visit, when they were third in line for a Colombian referral, Manon and her husband courageously withdrew from their international adoption. They took Christopher home as a foster child, with a view to adopting him.

During the fostering period and long wait for court, Christopher's siblings Lucy and Daniel—also special needs children—came into foster care with Manon and Kenny. In spite of considerable evidence that the biological parents could not safely be entrusted with the welfare of the children, the couple could not emotionally accept the fact of their limitations. It was a very stressful time for everyone concerned. The biological parents fought the adoptions. But one and a half years later, all three adoptions were approved and Manon had a family of five.

Manon and her husband would soon learn from Children's Aid that the biological parents had moved to the province of Quebec and became pregnant with yet another girl. Quebec social service intervened and asked Manon and Kenny, who had her siblings, about taking baby Julie, who was born in Montréal in 1996. But two days before they were to take her home, the Direction de la protection de la jeunesse said they were not eligible to take Julie because the baby fell under Quebec's jurisdiction and that Manon and Kenny's file was in Ontario. As a result,

Julie spent three months with a Quebec foster family while Manon and Kenny patiently sorted out the bureaucratic tangle, then Julie went to her forever home with Manon and Kenny. Manon now had a family of six.

The task of rather suddenly having to raise four children was more demanding than either Manon or Kenny had anticipated. People handle such stresses differently. Manon thrived under the challenge, Kenny did not. It became more and more difficult for him to cope with his family life. Until finally in 1998, after three years of trying, Kenny could no longer handle the situation. He left the family and Manon was left to face the challenge of raising four children as a single mother. During the divorce proceedings, she was informed that her children's biological parents had had yet another baby boy, and was asked if she would take him! She was not able to do so at the time, and Patrick went to a foster home in Quebec. In 2000, two years later when Manon had somewhat recovered from the stress of the divorce and the changes it meant for her, Manon told her children about their little brother, and they decided together to request a visit with him.

Two-year-old Patrick was mentally challenged and his foster family found caring for him very difficult; they informed social service that they needed respite care for him. Manon responded to their request for respite care and started taking him every second weekend. So naturally, when Patrick's Quebec foster parents broke up several years later in 2007, Manon asked to take over. She wasn't concerned about Patrick's special needs because "a child is a child", and she strongly felt that siblings should be kept together.

Manon has since been a single mother of five children with special needs, while working full-time outside the home. To her enormous credit her compassion extends to Kenny, her ex-husband, who is married again with children of his own, and to the children's biological parents. She identifies her family circle as including her ex-husband and her children's biological parents, to whom she has become a friend. Three of her children have mild to medium mental deficiencies, and two of the five have not been legally adopted and so remain technically foster children—although Manon is working towards the resolution of the issue. None of this was part of her plan in 1989, but she says today that she wouldn't change a thing about her family or her life. Manon's face

breaks into a huge smile when she talks about the special bonds her family shares. She says she cannot believe her luck, having been blessed with five children whom she describes as easy to raise and perfect for her. Her story reminds me that wishes can come true ... in abundance, just not always in the way that one might suppose they would occur.

As her children grow and move towards the natural need for independent living, Manon remains fully supportive.



Manon's children, left to right: Lucie-Geneviève, Julie, Patrick, Christopher & Daniel, Nov. 2008.

She encourages her children to develop themselves to the best of their potential and is always there for them. Christopher, while still living at home, has a full-time job in a company that hires workers with some limitations; Lucy has insisted on moving into a program that supports independent living for adults with some limitations. Daniel has moved out into his own apartment, has a job, has a girlfriend and is returning to college next September. Julie is still in high school and living at home, and does some volunteer work. And Patrick is still in primary school, living at home and doing well. All her children are bilingual, educated, social and finding their way in life.

Manon remains the proud mother, glorying in the accomplishments of her children and supporting them as they struggle to grow into independence and to cope with the special problems of their lives. To paraphrase the famous line of Dr. Seuss' Horton the Elephant in his defence of unborn children: "a person is a person no matter how small"; for Manon, "a person is a person no matter how special."

Karen Mayer (fellinicat2003@yahoo.com)

News and Current Events

Editorial Transition

For the last year, TDH Canada has published two newsletters: the TDH Ontario Quarterly Newsletter (English); its Editor is Sharon Kashino (Mississauga). The other is L'Infolettre (French). The latter has been edited by a core team of four: Fanny Lasselin and Bruno Lescouarch and Céline Lalbertie and Grégory Pierre with the support of about ten volunteer translators.

The combined teams have been solidly praised for the quality of the publications they have produced. And we at TDH are extremely grateful for their volunteer service. But the very nature of most volunteer service is that it is temporary and dependent upon changing conditions. On the first of May the four members of the L'Infolettre editorial team told us that their circumstances had changed – as indeed they have - and they would no longer be able to continue working on the task of producing L'Infolettre. Sharon Kashino will continue as editor of the Ontario newsletter, now with the assistance of Caroline Bennett.

We completely understand and accept the resignations of the L'Infolettre editors with full appreciation of the terrific work they have done. We all owe them a hearty vote of thanks for their considerable effort. There is no doubt that the task is formidable. They have set up the mechanics and structure, design and policies of L'Infolettre and have arranged for a smooth transition into the hands of the new (temporary) technical editor, Alexandre Brulotte. Alex is a summer student from Toronto, now living in Montreal. He has an expressed interest in adoption and social work. He came to us looking for a volunteer summer placement. We were able to accommodate him. He will be answering the phone in the Quebec office and working on several office projects for us in addition to temporarily taking on the task of newsletter editor.

All of us at TDH extend a heartfelt thanks to all our newsletter editors for their volunteer service and a job well done. It is an extraordinary contribution, and I know that you, as parents, as we, are deeply appreciative. Now the L'Infolettre torch must be passed on, and it is our sincere hope that one or several of you will be willing to take on this responsibility for the future. More information is available in the July issue of the L'Infolettre or by contacting Alex at: alexandre@tdh.ca. Volunteers wishing to contribute to the Ontario newsletter can contact Sharon at sharon@tdh.ca.

Brendan Cavanaugh (brendan@tdh.ca)

East Ontario Picnic – August 14

For the second year, Jack and Lisa Branswell have generously offered their cottage, located between Ottawa and Montreal, for a pot-luck TDH family gathering. Scheduled for Saturday, August 14 starting at 11:30am (rain date August 15). Space is limited, so RSVP soon.

A contribution of \$5 per family is requested. Please RSVP to Manon at: manon@tdh.ca Please indicate your potluck contribution in the **TDH Potluck Picnic at Jack & Lisa's Cottage** Database (on TDH Ontario NewsGroup) to ensure a variety of items.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/VietnamAdoptionCanada/database?method=reportRows&tbl=7>

News from Vankleek Hill

TDH was happy to participate in the Vankleek Hill May Show Festival on May 22, 23 & 24, 2010. An annual event since 1982, the art galleries showcased exhibits while entertainment and craft vendors took to the streets which had been closed to traffic for the occasion. Lots of Vietnamese items were sold by TDH office staff, particularly dragonflies, resulting in \$456 raised for TDH Canada at this small local event.

Manon Parent became a member to represent TDH Ontario with the Merchant Association of Vankleek Hill. Vankleek Hill is a small community and we welcome the opportunity to be good villagers and participate in the village activities as good neighbours. For more info visit:

http://www.champlain.ca/tourism_events.asp

Mark your calendars...next up, participation in the Festival of Flavours on Sept. 19. Then, on Nov. 6 TDH Ontario will open its doors to the community as part of the Victorian Christmas Home Tour. We hope to see you in Vankleek Hill!

Manon Parent (manon@tdh.ca)

Upcoming Fundraising and Social Activities Volunteers Wanted!

TDH Ontario is planning to host fundraising and social events in various cities across Canada, such as picnics, a Halloween party, a Tet celebration and the like.

These events are largely driven by volunteers. We are so grateful to TDH for the children they have brought into our lives and by volunteering we hope to give something back to the organization, to Vietnam and to the orphanages. We have core fundraising teams in Toronto and Ottawa, and we are looking for others to join us, both in these cities and in others!

We'd love to hear your ideas! The skills we're looking for include:

- * Writing in English or French
- * Experience in organizing fundraising events
- * Marketing skills
- * Graphic design skills
- * Business or sponsor contacts
- * Management skills
- * Creativity
- * Simply willing to help out!

By donating your time, whether an hour here or there or more, as you can, you receive so much in return:

- Meet other adoptive and perspective parents, who understand and have experienced the joys and issues of adoption and parenting such as attachment, bonding and retaining cultural contact.
- Acquire new skills.
- Help build a TDH family of families -- a great support network for us all.

If you are interested or have some questions please contact:

Christine Morra, TDHO fundraising coordinator: christine@tdh.ca

November is Adoption Awareness Month

So stay tuned for TDH events happening online and in your area to celebrate and bring awareness to this cause that has impacted us all! Further details on these events will be emailed to everyone!

Host a Fundraiser

Have you considered coordinating your own fundraiser for TDH? Whether you have an idea or need one, we would love team with you! Sell dragonflies, run a lemonade stand, have a movie night...email Christine with your ideas, or to ask for suggestions!

Questions/comments on fundraising and social activities can be emailed to christine@tdh.ca.

Christine Morra (christine@tdh.ca)

TDH Ontario Picnic at Sandbanks Sunday, June 6

Sunday, June 6, a TDHO picnic was scheduled for the Ontario adoptive families at Sandbanks Provincial Park near Picton, Ontario. We had indications that about 50 families would come, but – understandably, given the weather – only about 15 families made it.

The weather was unfortunate, in that the forecast was for rain, rain, rain and cool blustery winds. But even though the forecast was scary, arrangements had been made. Neither Helene nor Manon were able to attend, but Brendan and Dorinda arrived early Saturday afternoon and, with the help of Mike and Philip, put up two 40x20 tents and covered them with tarps in preparation for the rain. The weather was not exactly as predicted, but no one could know what it would be.

There were already two families who were there on their own camp sites. Philip and Sandra hosted supper and three more families came to visit. The weather Saturday evening was idyllic – warm, slightly breezy, fresh, sunny. The kids, most of whom were around three – their sense of security enhanced by the layout of the site itself - were now old enough to enjoy the beach and each other. They revelled in the sand, the warmth of the beach and the novelty of the sand dunes – the site was enclosed on one side by the dunes. The parents socialized and renewed friendships; the kids played on the dunes in front of their eyes. There was a campfire, smores, marshmallows and lots of conversation.



Dorinda, Marc, Sharon, Brendan, Christine (holding Xavier) and others very much enjoyed sitting around and chatting. Photo:Leslie Lightfoot

During the night the rains did come and they came in torrents, heavy rain and cool air. But the morning, although overcast, got warmer and more pleasant as the day proceeded – not sunny but pleasant. By the time the picnic was to start we had a group of about 15 families with kids scattered all over the lee sides of sheltering sand dunes. It was a picture perfect experience. Sharon (Newsletter Editor) with new assistant Carolyn and Christine (Fundraising) had a much appreciated chance to sit together and chat with Brendan and Dorinda.



Mathieu, Lily, Matthew, Nathaniel and Aiden were among the kids enjoying the dunes. Photos: Sandra Bellemere and Caroline Bennett

The food was plentiful and the table was loaded with good things to eat. The kids were well behaved and full of excitement. It was really a nice afternoon.

We want to express thanks and appreciation to everyone who attended the picnic and a special thanks to the individuals who pitched in and help to set-up, run the picnic and take everything down. The common consensus was that it was a great success.

This was our Third Annual TDHO Picnic. It is very difficult to find a fairly central location and a time when people can come. The schedules of the Park and the families are not easy to work with. The arrangements of these picnics are always risky. But we feel that it has been worth it for the families who do show up. We'll just hope for better weather next year! Picnics promote contacts and allow the casual sharing of information under more relaxed circumstances. The picnic is not the only thing we do, but we feel it is one of the important efforts we make to promote self-awareness among the adoptive community.

Along this same theme, there have been two suggestions for picnics to take place in August - one in Kingston and one in Ottawa. If you are interested in being part of either of these, please contact Manon and let her know (manon@tdh.ca).

Brendan Cavanaugh (brendan@tdh.ca)

NEW Arrivals!

Lynelle & Marien are excited to announce their little girl Amaya June-Le Gehrels from Vung Tau 1. They received their referral on January 28th and arrived home July 2nd. "We are very blessed with such a charming and lovable little girl!"



lynelleandmarien@yahoo.com
www.amayainvietnam.blogspot.com

Patrick Lewis & Meg Green of Ottawa proudly announce the arrival of Van Thomas Thang Green-Lewis from Hoa Binh. They returned on June 10, 2010.



meggreen31@yahoo.ca
www.journeytolittlewaterbuffalo.blogspot.com



Rita Ciammaichella of Langley, B.C. announced the arrival of her son Quang Ninh in the April newsletter. Here is his handsome photograph. He was born June 14, 2009 from Vung Tau 1. Referral received Sept. 18, 2009 and he arrived home Feb. 6, 2010.

ciammaic@hotmail.com

Catherine Jones is pleased to announce the arrival of her daughter Molly Minh Sanh Jones. Molly was born on May 19, 2009, referred Aug. 23, 2009 and adopted May 20, 2010 from Vung Tau 3. Catherine returned to Vancouver, B.C. with her on June 5, 2010.



catherinejones@uniserve.com
www.ob-la-di-vietnam.blogspot.com



The Nguyen family had an amazing journey to Vietnam with all 4 of their biological children 7,6,3,and 2 to finally hold in their arms their twins who they had grown in their hearts for so long. "We just loved Vietnam, the people were all so kind and it was a treat to be there with Our Angel, Dorinda and her group of young students. They made the journey to us feel like a family, they all loved our new family so much."

"Our twins are just a joy they are very spoiled by their siblings whom can never get enough of them. Our entire family feels that TDH found our angels for us. We miss all the friends we made a Summerset Hotel, and hope to go back... we need to keep our new babies' birth place a place we can all give back to."

All Our Love and Support, The Nguyen Family

Paula of Toronto received Lily on March 29th from Vung Tau 1. The G&R was 4 days later on Good Friday. It sure was a good Friday! Lily was just 6 months old then. What a wonderful trip we had with Lily's Aunt Michele along to welcome her. Lily just turned 9 months and is crawling up a storm.



ethieps@hotmail.com
www.journeytobabylily.blogspot.com

Blog Notice

Blogs are listed as a courtesy to our adoptive families. They are not to be considered publications of TDH. They represent the personal experiences and interpretations of individual families. TDH does not monitor and does not approve their content. We ask families to use discretion in their blog posts with the knowledge that public blogs may be monitored by officials in Canada and abroad. We recognize the value of sharing experiences and building common bonds among families who share the experience of adoption; therefore we publish these blog locations. However, their inclusion here does not imply that they reflect the positions of TDH or any of its staff nor does it indicate TDH's approval of the blog for accuracy, or interpretation of the information.

To announce your New Arrival

Email: Caroline Bennet at: clb2@rogers.com
Your Giving and Receiving Ceremony must be completed prior to the newsletter publication date (next issue due out Oct. 15).

Families Needed!

It is not so often that we are looking for families for children, but recently a number of special needs children have come to our attention.

The first is a girl of 10 years old who is living and has been raised by a group of Catholic nuns in Honduras. We are told she is a particularly sweet child, very well behaved and she speaks Spanish and English!

If you would be interested in learning more (photos are also available) please contact Emi (emi@tdh.ca).

In Vietnam there are two special needs little boys for whom we are seeking families. The first child, like the child profiled in the October 2009 newsletter, has arthrogryposis. He will likely require casting and surgery to improve his condition.

Another child I met in hospital just before his surgery. He was born with most of his lower abdominal internal organs (intestines, kidneys) outside his body (omphalocele). We are waiting for the medical to be done by Dr. Jonathan Halevy to know more details of his condition, but by report from the hospital his internal organs have been put back into place and an artificial "skin" has been created to hold everything in place. The baby was responsive, and apart from malnutrition due to his condition (which should now improve) appeared healthy and normal in his development. If you are interested, please contact Dorinda for further details.

And finally, a challenge. When I visited Trang Dai's orphanage (Vung Tau 1), she once again asked if any families might consider adopting a child who is HIV+. She in fact has many such children - some of them infants, all

of them beautiful - who can be immediately adopted.

I have since discovered a website directed to parents who would consider such a challenge:

<http://fromhivtohome.blogspot.com/>.

This site has two webinars which address the questions and concerns that adoptive parents may have regarding adoption of an HIV+ child. The major thing to understand is that a diagnosis of HIV+ status is no longer the life threat it once was. The fact is that with regular medical follow-up and adherence to the daily dosage of anti-viral medication, life expectancy for these children can not only be normal, but in fact, parents of HIV+ children with access to treatment can reasonably expect that their children can grow up, go to college, have successful careers, get married, have children, and even have grandchildren. We will be following up with further information on this topic, but if anyone is interested in learning more, discussing this further, or helping to promote this among adoptive families, please don't hesitate to contact Dorinda.

Dorinda Cavanaugh (dorinda@tdh.ca)

We are still looking for two families to host 2 boys of 10 years old as part of the Ukraine vacation program for the month of August. Further details are available in the April newsletter, or by contacting Nadia at: nadia@tdh.ca

Broader ADOPTION ISSUES

When Your Child Grows Up – Research Report

BEYOND CULTURE CAMP: PROMOTING HEALTHY IDENTITY FORMATION IN ADOPTION

Authors: Hollee McGinnis, Susan Livingston Smith, Dr. Scott D. Ryan and Dr. Jeanne A. Howard

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This study is the broadest, most extensive examination of adult adoptive identity to date, based on input from the primary experts on the subject: adults who were adopted as children.

http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/research/2009_11_culture_camp.php

One of the many topics under the rubric of “best interest of the child” is information about the internal issues of personal identity that all children, including adoptive children, usually have to cope with – especially if there is an obvious difference in ethnic origins between the parents and the child. This November 2009 research article, [Beyond Culture Camp: Promoting Healthy Identity Formation in Adoption](#) contains the latest informed opinions on the matters. For those who only have time to look at the highlights, we offer this summary. For those who want more, the url is above.

Funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and principally written by the staff of the American Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute it presents, first, a social service perspective and, secondly, a psychological slant on the question.

There are five (5) principal recommendations:

- * Recognize there is a problem: Although it may be less of a problem in multiethnic Toronto and Montreal than it is in the US, adoptive parents with children who are from a different ethnic group than they are themselves, should make it a point to educate themselves about racial identity development of their child and learn techniques for combating prejudice and stereotype from teachers, schoolmates and the general public.
- * Arm your kids: Adoptive parents whose children risk discrimination and psychological distress, lower self-esteem and personal discomfort should take care to teach their children how to cope with discrimination from an early age onward throughout their lives.
- * Political advocacy: For those who have a taste for political action, get involved with changes to laws, policies and practices that facilitate access to cultural and ethnic information for their adopted children.
- * Public Opinion: Work at the level of the individual slur or remark to promote awareness, education and public social disapproval of expressions of adoption-based discrimination.
- * Research support: Soft issues such as self-esteem and human emotional development are poorly understood in general. Help support research and publication in this area.

The US statistics point out that about a half million children have been internationally adopted by Caucasian parents since 1971 – from Asia, South America, and recently, Africa. In Canada the number has averaged between 1800 and 2000 per year over the last decade. In both countries there is movement to get children out of domestic foster care and into permanent adoption.

The Evan B. Donaldson Institute attempts to develop some depth of understanding about adoption. Its analysis of the data of this study has led to an eight (8) point summary:

- The fact of being adopted becomes more significant as people get older.
- Due to a number of factors, race and ethnic origin are becoming more significant in the development of personal identity.
- Coping successfully with discrimination is a major concern and challenge for some children.
- Surprisingly, same race adoptees observe that they face discrimination from their extended families (40%) while different race adoptees have to cope with discrimination from strangers (31%), and classmates (25%).
- Children tend to think of themselves as being the same as their parents – until challenged by racism or teasing caused them to rethink their situation. Then they have to figure out what to do culturally, with or without parental help.
- Positive racial/ethnic identity development is most effectively facilitated by “lived” experiences, by visits or participation in adoption-related organizations. Social models provided another major influence.
- The study’s findings show that – often in spite of discouragements – 86% of adoptees actually make the effort to find or at least find out about their birth parents and their birth culture. But the study also points out that meaning of that fact is not at all clear.

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Broader ADOPTION ISSUES cont'd

When Your Child Grows Up – Research Report ...cont'd

- Asking about the factors that contribute to children being comfortable with their status as adopted, same ethnic group children said their "life satisfaction" was the biggest factor. Children of a different ethnic group than the parents said it was three things: females were more comfortable than males, satisfaction with life, and self-esteem.

The general conclusions argued that while cultural celebrations were nice, they were superficial, and the more significant fact is that identity as a person adopted from another country is a complex and continually evolving process. In other words, there are not firm conclusions.

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

Some critical remarks gleaned from various sources: Is this question too important to leave to the experts who, like all experts, take an abstract and sometimes unrealistic view of the topic? Is this an example of "not seeing the forest for the trees"; that is, in the general case, does ethnic identity really count that much in the overall experience of a person? In a learned social context where genetics is repeatedly asserting the commonality of the human race as a whole, and the relative triviality of the environmental and mutation based variations that are dubbed 'race' and 'national identities' is this focus misguided and backward looking?

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Upcoming Adoption Seminars

THE JANE BROWN EVENTS FOR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES, October 1 to 3, 2010, Mississauga, Ontario

This event is hosted by Families with Children from China (FCC) Toronto. Jane Brown Playshops provide an opportunity for children, pre-teens, teens and parents to explore adoption issues in an interactive and fun way.

Registration form, details, and answers to commonly asked questions can be found at:

<http://janebrowntoronto.weebly.com/>

INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION SUMMIT – Public Sessions - September 24 – 26, Stratford, Ontario

To address the growing international concerns surrounding intercountry adoption and the need to reduce corruption and human trafficking while maximizing the best interests of children, the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada is hosting a first-ever Intercountry Adoption Summit. <http://adoptionsummit.uwaterloo.ca/index.html>

NORTH AMERICAN COUNCIL ON ADOPTABLE CHILDREN (NACAC) ANNUAL CONFERENCE – August 5-7, Hartford, Connecticut

NACAC's conference covers almost every adoption-related topic imaginable—with more than 80 sessions about post-adoption services, therapeutic techniques, parenting children with challenges, recruitment and pre-adoption issues, international/infant adoption, public policy, and more. Many sessions are advanced, so even experienced parents and workers will benefit.

<http://www.nacac.org/conference/conference.html>

Content Requests, Family Features, Comment Submissions

We endeavour to make each issue of our newsletter informative and interesting. If you have a suggestion for an article, wish to contribute an article, have comments, feedback, questions or a request for information on a particular topic, please let us know! You may also submit photos, with descriptive captions. We love your comments and feedback!

Send comments, questions, submissions to: sharon@tdh.ca

International Adoption Medicine (Vietnam)

Hepatitis B in babies and children

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that causes an inflammation of the liver. The main routes of transmission are through the blood (blood transfusion, sharing needles or razors, contact with bleeding wounds), sexual intercourse and from mother to the newborn, during the delivery of the baby.

In children, unlike adults, the course of disease is different. Most adults that contract HBV are cured. Unfortunately, about 90% of the newborns who contract HBV become chronic carriers. 25 – 50% of children at ages 1 – 5 years become carriers and only 2 – 6% of older children and adolescents.

Most of the newborns that contract HBV are asymptomatic and liver function tests can stay normal for many years. Unfortunately, about 25% of the carrier children will develop Cirrhosis and liver cancer (after about 20 – 30 years).

According to CDC about 1 – 5% of adopted babies from South East Asia and Eastern Europe to America are HBV carriers.

Diagnosis of HBV infection:

HBsAg: The recommended test for screening is the HBsAg. This is an antigen on the surface of the virus. It is the earliest marker of infection. It usually appears about 3 weeks after infection but sometimes even after several months.

HBsAb: These are antibodies against HBsAg. The test becomes positive after vaccination or after recovering from HBV infection. It shows immunity against HBV. Practically, it means that if the test is positive the person is not infected and is not a carrier.

In babies (below 1 year old) the test can be positive as a result of maternal antibodies transferred to the baby during pregnancy. Maternal antibodies usually are not detected anymore after 1 year old.

HBcAb: antibodies against core antigen. They become positive after infection and stay positive for life, even when person has recovered from HBV infection.

HBeAb: Antibodies against a viral envelope antigen. They indicate a high level of replication of the virus and thus high level of activity and infectivity. Some HBV strains do not have this antigen and the test can be negative.

HBV PCR DNA: PCR test is a special test that detects copies of DNA or RNA genetic material. It is highly sensitive when the virus is replicating. It is used to measure the “viral load” in the blood – another indicator of viral replication and activity of disease.

Special circumstances of adopted babies:

A negative HBsAg test in very young babies cannot rule out completely HBV infection, since it might take several months for the test to turn positive. Furthermore, since babies in orphanages are living in close contact with other babies or caregivers that may be HBV carriers, there is still a small chance of infection as long as the baby lives there. Therefore, it is necessary to repeat the test again after several months (preferably after 1 year old). A positive HBsAb – usually means the child is immune. But if the antibodies are maternal the test will become negative after 1 year old.

Reliability of laboratory tests:

Unfortunately, even under best of circumstances, no test is 100% sensitive and 100% specific. A test with 98% sensitivity (such as the HBsAb and HBsAg) is considered highly accurate. But it means that 2 out of a 100 people tested will be negative even though they are sick.

Treatment of HBV infection in children:

Unfortunately, there is still no medicine that cures HBV infection. But there are anti – viral medications (e.g. Lamivudine) and Interferon Gamma that can help suppress the replication of the virus and slow down the process of liver destruction.

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Adoption in Depth... financial assistance for adoptive parents

There are significant costs involved with International Adoption which can create difficulties for families. Thankfully, there are some programs, outlined below, available to assist Canadians.

EI – Employment Insurance for Regular Workers

It is likely you know about maternity benefits, however, did you know you may also be eligible for parental benefits from the Government of Canada? Adoptive parents can receive up to a maximum of 35 weeks of parental benefits, provided they have worked 600 insured hours in the previous 52 weeks or prior to their last claim. You must also show that, in leaving your work, your income will drop by at least 40%. These benefits can be shared between parents or claimed by one parent, however, the combined maximum benefit is 35 weeks.

You can claim parental benefits if you are outside of Canada but you must advise your Service Canada Centre.

How much will you receive? 55% of your average earnings to a yearly maximum of \$43,200. So the maximum amount per week you could be eligible for is \$457. This is considered taxable income so, where applicable, federal and provincial or territorial taxes will be deducted.

www.serviccanada.gc.ca

EI – Employment Insurance for Self-Employed Workers

Effective January 31, 2010, Canadians who are self-employed can start to contribute to EI and, effective January 2011, will be able to access EI special benefits such as parental leave. In order to qualify, you must fill out an agreement with the Canada Employment Insurance Commission through Service Canada and have contributed for 12 consecutive months prior to your claim.

A word of caution...you can choose to terminate your agreement, however, once you receive benefits, you will be required to continue to pay the EI premiums as long as you are self-employed.

National Bank of Canada International Adoption Loan

You can apply for a loan from the National Bank of Canada for between \$10,000 and \$20,000. The interest rate is Prime plus 0.75%. As of June 2010, the Prime rate was 2.5%, therefore, the interest rate on the loan would be 3.25%. To reduce your interest costs, you can be approved for a set amount and then request your loan be disbursed gradually, as needed. The minimum payout amount is \$1000.

If needed, you may also be approved for a LOC at a reduced rate. Additionally, they offer a Personal Flex Line Of Credit (LOC) at a low interest rate of Prime with no administration fees, for a period of 6 months. They also offer free enrolment in the banking package of your choice applicable to your LOC.

<http://www.nbc.ca>

Other Adoption Related Resources

There is a federal tax credit available to Adoptive Families in the year the adoption has been finalized, up to \$10,643. Eligible expenses are listed through the Canada Revenue Agency.

www.cra-arc.gc.ca

Another option to look into is workplace benefits for adopting employees. The Dave Thomas Foundation or Adoptive Families Magazine has a current list of the top adoption friendly employers. Many Canadian companies are also coming on board.

www.davethomasfoundation.org

www.adoptivefamilies.com

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