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TDH Welcomes Delegates from Hoa Binh and Tra Vinh

TDH hosted a delegation of Vietnamese provincial officials from the provinces of Tra Vinh and Hoa Binh from Friday, May 22nd to Monday June 1st. Comprising the group were:

Mr. Nguyen Huu Duyet, Vice-chairman of People's Committee, Hoa Binh
Mr. Nguyen Trung Dung Vice-director of DOLISA, Hoa Binh
Mr. Bui Thanh Son Chief of Immigration Department, Hoa Binh
Mr. Luu Thanh Tai: Director of orphanage of Hoa Binh
Mrs. Le Thi Ngoc Hue: Vice-director of Department of Justice of Tra Vinh
Mr. Ha Xuan Phuoc: Vice-director of orphanage of Tra Vinh
Mrs. Tran Bich Thuy, Representative of TDH Canada in Vietnam

Please see *Delegation* on page 6



Children adopted from Hoa Binh & Tra Vinh living in the Ottawa region along with the Vietnamese delegation from these two provinces, parents and the TDHO staff.

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Vietnam: adoption program

Hélène Parisien (helene@tdh.ca)

Statistics: 2nd Quarter - 2009

There have been 7 proposals to Ontario families between April 1 and June 30, 2009, including 3 boys and 4 girls. Among these 7 children there were 1 older child, 1 child with special needs, and 1 set of twin girls. 4 children were from Vung Tau, 2 were from Tra Vinh, and 1 from Go Vap. Most of the referrals made in this period were to families whose documents went to Vietnam in early autumn of 2007.

Adoptions: 2008

There were 29 adoptions from Vietnam completed for Ontario families in 2008, including 15 boys and 14 girls. Of these 1 was a relative adoption (not from an orphanage), 2 had special needs and there was one set of twins. 18 of these children were from Vung Tau, 5 from Hoa Binh, 4 from Tra Vinh and 1 from Quang Ninh.

Vietnam: waiting time proposal to travel

Waiting parents believe that the hardest part of the wait is between their dossier being completed and receiving “the call” that a child is waiting. Indeed it is long, and often discouraging, but the wait for the signal to pack your bags and leave has its own set of anxieties.

There is a law in Vietnam that says the adoption procedures should be completed in 120 days. Even that seems long, but there is a sense that at least to have a target date is comforting. After all, pregnancy finishes after 9 months, give or take a few weeks.

Not so with the adoption process in Vietnam. There is great variability between one province and another, even between one orphanage and another in the same province, both in terms of time frame and in terms of what information is available to parents as to where things are. Over the past year, Vietnam’s central authority has become more and more vigilant working hard to insure that all adoptions from all provinces are done legally and ethically. And while TDH, after careful screening, has chosen to work specifically with some of the many provinces that are conscientiously doing a thorough job of investigating the situation of the children placed for adoption, at this point the central authority is approaching each case from every province with equal vigilance.

I thought it might be helpful to provide a general description of how things go during those last months before travel, and to indicate some of the differences.

The process starts with the orphanage indicating that a certain child or children may be proposed for adoption. TDH arranges for the medical examination of this child or children, in collaboration with the orphanage director and his/her schedule and availability. If the child is healthy, Thuy, TDH’s representative in Vietnam, will indicate to the Department of International Adoption (DIA) that they may send the “First letter”, asking the provincial Department of Justice to propose the child for adoption to a particular set of parents. At this point a preliminary proposal may be made, and the Department of Justice will at the same time ask the orphanage to prepare the child dossier.

Usually at the moment that the preliminary proposal is made, if the child has been abandoned, a first notice of search will have been published in the provincial media in an effort to find the birth parents. If after 30 days no one has contacted the orphanage, the orphanage may register the child’s birth officially. Following this, a second notice of search is diffused, this time asking if any local family wishes to adopt the child. This notice may actually take place after the preliminary proposal, so another 30 days may pass before the formal proposal arrives at the DIA, usually along with the child documents (birth certificate, minutes of abandonment or parental consent, official placement of the child in the orphanage, proof of the notice of search).

The DIA then sends out the “Second letter”, this one asking the provincial Department of Justice (DOJ) to investigate the situation of the child to determine that all legal procedures have been followed, and that, if the child was relinquished, there was no pressure or incentive of any kind on the mother, and that she understands the full implications of an adoption. This step is approached differently by different provinces. Tra Vinh’s investigation is done by Mr. Gia of the DOJ, who personally conducts the investigation, and by the time the adoptive parents come, he knows every detail of the child and his or her family. In other provinces (Hoa Binh, Ben Tre) it is an investigation carried out jointly by the police and Justice Department, and we have no information during the 4-6 weeks when this is in process. It is only when it is finalized that we are informed that this stage is complete; there is no advance notification.

There are also differences according to whether most of the children in a province are relinquished (Tra Vinh, Hoa Binh) or abandoned (Vung Tau, Ho Chi Minh City), the longer time being for situations of relinquishment. And there is a particular situation in the province of Quang Ninh, where children are sometimes apprehended by police because they are victims of child trafficking (children – mostly boys – being transported across the border to China). In this case there is a long investigation, an attempt to find the parents, and a court judgement before the child can be cleared for adoption.

Proposal to travel from page 2

Once the investigation is complete, the dossier of the child will be delivered to the Ministry of Justice in Hanoi first, before it is delivered to the DIA (the secretary) to be registered and then to the vice director or the director, and then at last sent to the person in charge of that case. The new director is asking the staff to spend at least 1 week studying carefully the dossier before submitting it to the vice director for verification, then to the director for final approval and signature. Based on the experience with the last several cases, it takes between 3 - 5 weeks to get through this part of the process alone.

These changes at the level of the Department of International Adoption are having a serious impact on the length of the adoption procedures. In the last newsletter we mentioned that there was a new regulation that all documents would now be sent by regular mail rather than by courier, thus lengthening the procedures. Now in addition, the new Director of the DIA has instituted these even more bureaucratized procedures. Since several persons are verifying every detail, the procedure which used to take a day or two is now taking two weeks or more. Even minor discrepancies are noted (e.g. typos, a discrepancy of 10 grams in the child's weight on different documents...), and if found, the whole dossier is sent back to the province for correction. The result of all this is that we must estimate another month to the waiting period between proposal and trip to Vietnam.

So as a general rule, you can estimate the time from proposal to adoption to be 4 to 6 months, at least at the present time. The "milestones" of the process are the following:

1. Preliminary matching - immediately
2. Second notice of search, if required - 30 days
3. First letter sent by DIA to province - up to 1 week after step 1
4. Proposal sent by province to DIA - immediately following step 2 completion
5. Second letter sent by DIA to province - 2-3 weeks
6. Child dossier and report sent to DIA - 30 days
7. Verification by DIA - 3-5 weeks
8. Parent dossier sent to province
9. DOJ prepares Decision on Adoption
10. People's Committee signs Decision

Please also keep in mind that this assumes that there are no "glitches" in the process, such as errors in the search notice, discrepancies found by the DIA, additional investigative procedures required, etc.

Once the dossier leaves the DIA, the rest of the procedure is at last fairly predictable. From the time the parent dossier is sent (Step 8), you can estimate departure in 1-2 weeks. In-country time will not increase from the current estimate of approximately 3 weeks.

Dorinda Cavanaugh (dorinda@tdh.ca)

Ukraine: adoption program



Mathilde on her 3rd birthday.
She was adopted at age 2.

Sadly, there seems to be a certain hesitation among adoptive parents to embark on an adoption in Ukraine, as well as other eastern European countries. Reasons given for this hesitation range from the age of the children, to the risk of fetal alcohol syndrome, to the effect of long term residence in an orphanage. These reasons seem to be equated with the notion that the children receive poor care; that is not the case in Ukraine.

Since we have not completed any dossiers for Ukraine from Ontario, I cannot site any statistics for this last year. However, TDH Pour Les Enfants (Quebec) has completed 19 adoptions from Ukraine since the beginning of the program in 2006, 15 of which were in the last year. Among these children 6 were under 3 years old, 5 were between 3 and 5, 7 were between 5 and 9 years old, and 1 child was 12 years old. There were 3 sibling groups: a brother and sister of 15 and 30 months, 3 children of 4, 6, and 12 years old, and 2 sisters of 6 and 8 years old.

Please see *Ukraine Program* on page 4

Ukraine Program from page 3

Apart from a very few minor medical issues (strabismus, ptosis, and congenital malformation of 1 eye), all of the children appear to be in excellent health, and are adjusting well in their new families.

The waiting time between deposit of the dossier in Ukraine and travel to complete the adoption has averaged less than 3 months.

The main challenge of this program is in terms of Ukraine's own system of child selection. Potential adoptive parents receive a letter of invitation to come to the Ukraine, and must go to a meeting at the Department of Adoption where they are presented with child dossiers matching the child approved in the homestudy. The number of children presented on any given day depends on when they were entered on the database in relation to how many adoptive parents' rendez-vous have taken place since that moment. Thus if 10 new children had been placed on the database on Tuesday at 4 and your appointment was Wednesday at 9, it is likely that there will be a fair number of children who meet the criteria for which you have been approved. But if your rendez-vous is Thursday at 4, there are likely to be fewer children who are suitable for you. The placement of children on the database occurs randomly, so there is no "better day" for the rendez-vous.

Because of this, we advise our families to work with their practitioners to be as flexible as possible regarding the age of child who can be adopted. The couple whose homestudy recommends them for a child between 2 and 5 with minor correctable special needs, or in "relatively good health" may adopt a 2 year old in perfect health, but would not be ruled out from adopting the beautiful 4 year old who captures their heart at first regard. It has been our experience that this often happens, and the couple who thought they could not be interested in a child over 2 come home with a child of 4 whom they adore.

Information about the child's social and medical history is available at the time of your meeting, and can also be verified with the director of the orphanage and a medical specialist of their choice. There is also information about the birth mother and the reasons that the child is placed in the orphanage.



Mario (on right) recently adopted, with three of his friends from the orphanage.

Many sibling groups are available for adoption, so if you would consider this, please be sure to explore this option in advance with your practitioner.

The Ukraine adoption experience is not an easy one – you must be prepared to stay in Ukraine 8 weeks (at least one parent), and to carefully follow the directives of our experienced coordinator, who has successfully completed many adoptions. The total cost for Ukraine is about the same as for Vietnam. It is possible as well that you may not choose a child at the first meeting, but you may have two other meetings to do this, and you will have the support of our coordinator, as well as of the psychologist at the Center.

Adoption is about offering a child to a family who would otherwise not have one. In the case of Ukraine, especially for older children, this is especially true. More than once children have told their new parents: "I have been waiting for you so long."

Dorinda Cavanaugh (dorinda@tdh.ca)

We are considering a program to bring Ukrainian children aged 6 years and older for summer vacation here in Canada in 2010. Many of these children may be adoptable at a future date. We would look for families ready to sponsor/host these children for 1 month next summer. If you are interested, please contact Manon for more information.

Honduras: program open!

We are pleased to announce that the Ontario Ministry has approved and licensed TDHO for the Honduras program. Initially, 10 families will be accepted into the program. Couples married for at least three years and single women may apply. Boys and girls 1 year and older are generally referred. The estimated wait for a child 1 to 3 years old is 4 years. Shorter delays are expected for children over 3 and even shorter for children over 6 years old. The adoption can be completed over 2 trips to Honduras, or one longer trip.

For more information please contact:

Manon Parent (manon@tdh.ca) or
Emi Svetlitz (emi@tdh.ca)

TDH: its Structure

TDH Canada, Inc., is a federally registered charitable organization focused on the needs of children worldwide that have been abandoned and endure disadvantaged lives. It can be easy when you are focused on your own adoption to forget that the mission of TDH Canada is much broader than adoptions alone. It is 'to relieve the child in need and to empower the community to sustain the growth of the child abroad and at home as the individual situation requires'.

TDH is a member of the International Federation of Terre des Hommes. The family of TDH in Canada consists of three separate organizations: TDH Canada, TDH pour les enfants in Quebec and TDH Ontario.

TDH Ontario is a non-profit provincially incorporated organization, which facilitates international adoption for the residents of Ontario and other provinces (except Quebec). It is licensed by the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services to work in Vietnam, Honduras and in Ukraine. Since the beginning of its activities in adoption in 2006, TDH Ontario has done more than 100 adoptions.

TDH pour les enfants is a provincially incorporated charitable organization registered Quebec that facilitates international adoption for Quebec residents.

For more information on the history of TDH in Canada and our many initiatives view our brochure:

<http://tdhontario.tdh.ca/brochure.html>

Brendan Cavanaugh (brendan@tdh.ca)

Useful References

Children's Bridge offers ongoing workshops and seminars of interest to adoptive families. Special events upcoming include "A Celebration of Me" Family Camp Sept. 11 to 13 in Haliburton and "The Jane Brown Events for All Adoptive Families" September 25 to 27, 2009 in Mississauga.
www.childrensbridge.com

Sofie Stergianis, a private adoption practitioner in Toronto, offers seminars on international adoption as well as PRIDE training.
www.adoptioneducation.ca

The Open Door Society, Ottawa is a volunteer-run organization supporting families formed through adoption. A weekly playgroup is held at the Champlain Fieldhouse in Ottawa on Fridays from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The format is casual, ensuring playtime for both children and adults!
www.odisplaygroup.org

Adoption related Yahoo Groups provide interesting discussion on all things Vietnam and adoption. Join one of the yahoo groups:
'VietnamAdoptionCanada' (English)
'enfants_du_vietnam' (French)
at: <http://groups.yahoo.com/>

GTA Waiting Moms is a group for Canadian Waiting Mommies who live in the greater Toronto area and are committed to adopting internationally; are in the process of doing so, or who have already adopted. We meet regularly to discuss anything related to International Adoption and share our experiences and advice with each other. Join the yahoo group:
'gtachinawaitingmommies' at:
<http://groups.yahoo.com/>

FCV (Families with Children from Vietnam) Toronto provides opportunities to meet other families with children adopted from Vietnam and to honour the Vietnamese culture through various celebrations and informal get-togethers. Join the yahoo group: 'fcvtoronto' at:
<http://groups.yahoo.com/>

Delegation from page 1

In an effort to show the delegation something of Canada, in ten days they visited 3 provinces, 4 major cities and attended 4 major cultural entertainments.

Included in their visit:

- A short tour of Toronto
- A week-long tour of Quebec and nearby Ontario sites
- A tour of Vancouver
- A brief visit with some personal friends

The main purpose of the visit was to allow the delegates the opportunity to assure themselves the children placed for adoption in Canada are well adjusted, well-loved, cared for and that Vietnam's intent to secure the best interests of the children have been met. Proud families from across Canada were happy to meet with the delegation.



Over their 11 day visit they visited 18 families in three cities, Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal as well as 2 families in Vancouver, accompanied by Marg Harrington of Sunrise Family Services, a partner of TDH Ontario.

Before they boarded the plane for their return trip, the otherwise very quiet Mr. Nguyen Huu Duyet, Vice-chairman of People's Committee, Hoa Binh and thus the senior member of the delegation, commented that the visit had been a success; he said they felt warmly received, and appreciated that fact that Brendan and Dorinda personally accompanied them. Most important of all he and his colleagues saw for themselves that the Vietnamese children were loved and cared for. He pointed out that the fact the parents all brought their children to the picnics and dinners deeply impressed him and convinced him that their love for the children was real.

Nguyen Huu Duyet showed himself to be a man of unusual compassionate understanding, perception and depth. He commented further that he realized that, due to the unfortunate circumstances of life, these Vietnamese children had lost their birthparents. The only refuge any state could provide for them was the minimal institutional life of an orphanage and then a bleak, unsupported future afterwards. He fully realized that the Canadians he met during this trip were responding to the very real needs of these children by giving them both a loving, caring family and a full chance for a meaningful future. Nguyen Huu Duyet's balanced and meaningful observations about international adoption were greatly appreciated by the members of TDH.

Background on Delegate Visits...

Delegations are sponsored by TDH with the reserve funds of the 'delegation' portion of adoption expenses. Typically these visits occur once or twice a year. There are usually about four delegates in each party, sometimes more. The past Director of International Adoptions as well as officials from Vung Tau, Tra Vinh and Quang Ninh have visited recently.

Brendan Cavanaugh (brendan@tdh.ca)



NEW Arrivals!

Samantha Haines and Woody Oord of Ottawa welcomed Maxem and Vanh Oord, born July 19, 2008 from **Tra Vinh**. They arrived home March 4, 2009.



www.trahvinh-ottawa.blogspot.com
Scaramantha@hotmail.com

Brian & Nicole of Toronto welcomed Nate (Nathaniel) Richard Tan, born Dec 31, 2008 from **Hoa Binh** Social Assistance Centre. The family arrived home on May 23, 2009.



<http://www.bringingnatehome.blogspot.com/>
lola2232@yahoo.com

Lillian and Dave Winkler of Toronto welcomed Daniel Simon Hoang Xuan Winkler, born November 2008 from **Tra Vinh**. They arrived home June 14, 2009.



www.babystepsinspring.blogspot.com
lillian8@sympatico.ca

Olivier & Stephanie Guillaume of Toronto welcomed Ava and Alexa, born January 28, 2009 from **Vung Tau I**. The family arrived home July 5, 2009.



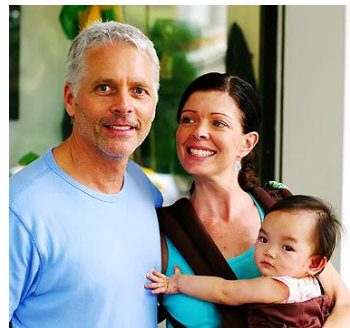
oguillaume@ymail.com
stephguillaume@hotmail.com

Leslie & Shaune Lightfoot of Stirling welcomed Meg Linh Bao Thy Lightfoot, born December 17, 2008 from **Vung Tau II**. The family arrived home July 8, 2009.



www.lightfoots-witharmswideopen.blogspot.com
llightfoot@xplornet.com

Renny Duquette & George Chambers of Toronto are the proud parents of Lia Thanh Chambers. Lia was born in Ba Ria, Vung Tau and lived at the **Vung Tau III** orphanage from the age of 3 days old. She was born on July 3rd, 2008. The family will be arriving home soon!



rennyduquette@rogers.com

News and Current Events

Full citizenship for ALL adopted children - Bill C-397

In December, 2007 Bill C-14 came into force recognizing the equality of adopted children to birth children and giving adoptive parents the right to apply for immediate citizenship for their child(ren). Two months later another bill was passed which took away the full privilege granted by the law of 2007 and created two tiers of citizenship. Any adopted child whose parents followed the direct citizenship route would lose the right to pass on that citizenship under circumstances that were not extraordinary: giving birth to or adopting a child outside of Canada. Now MP Olivia Chow has proposed Bill-397 to attempt to rectify the situation: giving all adopted children full citizenship. (The issues also affect the children of ex-patriots living abroad and a group of individuals known as the 'Lost Canadians'.)

Firmly believing that these current prescriptions of the law are discriminatory and contrary to the rights of the parents as Canadian citizens TDH Director Dorinda Cavanaugh circulated an online petition at: <http://www.petitiononline.com/C397/petition.html>. To date over 2000 people have signed.

In addition, TDH was one of three adoption organizations asked to present their views on the current citizenship debate to a Parliamentary Subcommittee. The text of Ms. Cavanaugh's testimony is available at: http://www.tdhontario.tdh.ca/downloads/testimony_final.pdf

The TDH Ontario Annual Picnic

On Sunday, July 5, TDH Ontario held its 2nd annual picnic at Sandbanks Provincial Park. Very fortunately we had the use of one of the beach sites, so we were able to welcome about 15 families to the private beach for the picnic. The pot-luck lunch was set up under a 20x10 screen tent on the beach. There were storms the previous day, so the surf was strong. It was mesmerizing; people sat in comfortable beach chairs watching it while some of the older children splashed in the shallow edge of the water. It was sunny with some scattered clouds to give intermittent shade. It was really a beautiful day and an enjoyable experience.

News from Vankleek Hill

Please note that the office will be closed for holidays from July 31 to August 16, 2009. In case of emergency contact Dorinda by email at dorinda@tdh.ca. Alternatively, phone the Montreal office at 514-937-3325.

Just as our first newsletter was about to be published, our third staff person in TDH Ontario, Carolyn Baurenschmidt had to leave for personal reasons. We wish Carolyn success in whatever field of endeavour she chooses and express our warm thanks for all that she accomplished at TDHO during her time with us.

Dorinda is planning a trip to Vietnam this quarter to attend the opening of the Ben Tre orphanage.

Broader ADOPTION ISSUES

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

On June 25, 2008 The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC) released a new study on "*The Best Interests of the Child: Meaning and Application in Canada*".

The phrase "Best Interests of the Child" is used to cover a wide range of court and social service decisions. The undefined concept of the "Best Interests of the Child" is a core principle in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, the interpretation of the meaning of the phrase is left up to judges and social workers. This report reflects on its use, misuse, and under-use in Canada. This text of the report is based on a recent Convention in Toronto on the topic.

The report proposes that the focus for applying the Best Interests of the Child principle should shift from crisis response to prevention, through early attention in the development of all policies and programs that affect children. There is a lengthy section specific to adoption. The full report is at: www.rightsofchildren.ca

THE HAGUE : VIETNAM

Vietnam is in open discussion on the Hague Convention and the draft of a new law is being presented to the National Assembly. The final version will probably be presented in a month or two. The Hague Convention could go into effect in Vietnam as early as 2011.

Adoption in Depth... follow up reports

An important part of the adoption process is the POST ADOPTION CONTRACT RELATIVE TO THE PRODUCTION OF THE FOLLOW UP REPORTS which can be found in your contract with TDH as Annex F. This agreement has been developed to ensure that reports are produced within a specific time & schedule. They also provide Vietnam officials with the assurance that their children are well adapted and taken care of in their new family and country. Without the families' timely completion of these reports Vietnam could choose to close adoptions for Canada. These reports are a condition in our agreement with Vietnam and a requirement for the Ministry here in Ontario.

The adoptive parents are responsible for;

- Producing the reports in **four copies**.
- Including with **each copy four different photos** of their child.
- Sending the reports in a timely fashion as per the schedule.
- Insuring that the schedule is noted as the first six follow up reports to be submitted to the organization at the latest the 5th month, the 11th month, the 17th month, the 23rd month, the 29th month and the 35th month following the date of the adoption decision pronounced in Vietnam. Subsequent reports to be submitted once per year, at the latest one month before the anniversary of the adoption decision pronounced in Vietnam.

TDH staff sends out reminders of the due-date for these reports to the families, but now with seventy-seven adoptive families the reminders are only sent once at the beginning of each month when the report is due. In the end, it is the adoptive parent's responsibility to complete and send the reports in time to the Vankleek Hill office. To facilitate the completion of your reports, the guidelines and forms have recently been posted at:

<http://www.tdhontario.tdh.ca/downloads/VietnamPostPlacementFormTDH1-5.doc> for children under 5 years old

<http://www.tdhontario.tdh.ca/downloads/VietnamPostPlacementFormTDH5+.doc> for children over 5 years old

The guidelines specify general topics on which you need to provide comments & information on your child. It is advisable to mark your own calendar and/or create your own automatic reminder of your due dates. It is important to complete your reports on time in order for them to be sent to Vietnam, be translated and deposited at the Department of International Adoption, the orphanage and the Province from which your child was adopted. Copies are also kept at the TDH office in Vankleek Hill as well as the TDH Vietnam office.

The photos are to give Vietnam a look into the lives of the children, to see how they are evolving and growing within a different country and culture, to share their families and daily routines. Here are some examples of what the photos can show:

- ☑ The photos can be of the child with mom & dad, sibling, grandparents, friends, playing in the park, with a special teacher at school, daycare or special events such as birthdays, first day of school....

As far as how much information to write, as long as you cover the topics in the guideline you are on track. Some families use the reports as a source of information for their children when they are older, and therefore they write a lot of information. Some families simply answer the questions with a few words. Tuy, TDH's representative in Vietnam, gives a summary of the report, so as long as the parents do the report in a reasonable fashion it is acceptable.

Doing these reports is not a choice for the family. It is an obligation. It is part of what you accept to do if you choose to adopt. Aside from the contractual obligation, these reports offer a valuable record of your child's development. Be sure to keep a copy for yourself as well!

If you have any questions or concerns you can always contact H el ene at helene@tdh.ca.

H el ene Parisien (helene@tdh.ca)