

The Final Step

Post Adoption Reporting

By Sue Marquette Poremba

The day that Melia Hoffman and Ted McFadden of Bayville, N.J., adopted their two children from Kazakhstan is called "Gotcha Day." One of the things these parents do on each Gotcha Day is prepare each child's post-adoption report. Hoffman created a form that she uses to streamline the process. She records each child's height, weight, overall health, development, daily routine and social life (family and friends). She also includes 5 to 10 photographs. When the report is finished, it is sent to the agency that facilitated the adoption. Because of Kazakhstan's requirements, Hoffman and McFadden will be filing these reports until each child is 18 years old.

Post adoption reports are required for nearly every international adoption, according to Linda Donovan, the international program director at Adoption Alliance in Denver, Colo. "The reports document the health of the child and what they are doing developmentally," she says. "Some also require a picture of the child as proof the child is thriving. Unfortunately, she adds, there are rumors that circulate that Americans adopt the babies for body parts and other sinister behaviors. While these stories are urban legends, the post adoption reports allow the country administering the adoption to know the child is in a safe, loving home. In Russia, for example, there was a

slow down in adoptions because of the lack of reporting and stories about the children being abused."

Importance of the Post Adoption Report

"Annual adoption updates are absolutely critical to international adoption," says Michelle Madrid-Branch, author of Adoption Means Love: Triumph of the Heart (Adoption Tribe Publishing, 2005). "Each family that adopts internationally agrees to cooperate by filing, on time, the appropriate paperwork, along with photos of their child. All families should understand that their non-compliance with this rule could potentially cause another family to lose the opportunity to adopt from another country."

Terry Petrone, Eastern Europe program director of Adoptions from the Heart in Cherry Hill, N.J., concurs. "Countries take reporting seriously," she says. "Ukraine, for example, is threatening to stop U.S. adoptions because families aren't complying."

This is truly a situation where the inaction of a few could end up hurting many. When those families who have adopted don't comply with their obligation to send a post adoption report, the country can stop or limit adoptions. Prospective parents lose out because the adoption process is halted. Individual adoption agencies can be affected. The country may choose to stop working with a particular agency if too many of that agency's families aren't submitting their reports.

Most important, the children waiting to be adopted are at risk by failure to submit post adoption reports. By preventing specific agencies or an entire country from adopting in the country, fewer children will be adopted. Children who would otherwise have had the opportunity to live in a loving, stable home will remain in orphanages. "One family can impact an entire program," Petrone says. The Ukraine demands 100 percent compliance, and the next family who ignores the requirement could shut down the entire system.

Part of the Contract

Prospective parents are made aware of the need to submit post adoption reports from the very beginning. It is part of the contract. Each country has a different post adoption reporting process. In China, the report is facilitated by the agency and uses a social worker. The Ukraine wants the process to be between the country officials and the family. Some countries require reports at six months and the first year, but nothing more. Other countries require an annual report until the child turns 18. During the adoption process, prospective parents receive instructions regarding the requirements of the country from which they are adopting.



Once the adoption is completed and the child is legally bonded with the parents, there is no way to enforce parents to send a post adoption report. No one is going to take the child away if the report isn't sent. Adoption agency employees speculate that parents either don't understand the importance of sending the reports or they think that because

the adoption is complete, there is no reason to follow up.

Agencies do know how important the reporting process is and do whatever they can to facilitate it. Reports filed by the agency and a social worker are easy to monitor. Some agencies put money in escrow, holding it until after the post adoption reporting obligations are fulfilled. While it is rarely (if ever) done, a contract specifically discussing the post adoption reporting makes it a legal, binding agreement, and parents could be brought to court in order to comply. Education is also important. Agencies need to continue to stress the consequences if they don't send the report.

To protect themselves, the parents should always send a copy of the report to the adoption agency. That way, if the country claims a report is missing, the agency has something on record.

"The main thing is this is really important," Petrone says. "A lack of reporting is a threat to international adoptions. Foreign countries are taking on a huge risk, and they have a right to know the children are getting a better life."

Post Adoption Reports: A Labor of Love

Rather than seeing it as a chore or an obligation, parents can approach post adoption reporting as a special opportunity to develop a closer bond with their child.

"Filling my son's post placement reports to Russia has been an absolute joy," Madrid-Branch says. "Documenting his progress and selecting photos to share with his home country gives a feeling of sincere and absolute pride."



"It's a labor of love," McFadden says. "You will be helping other people." At the baby home that facilitated the McFadden adoption, photos of his children and other children are posted on the wall and serve as inspiration for other children and families who are adopted. McFadden's daughter loves hearing the story of her adoption, and both he and his wife expect that as their children get older, they will help write the report. It will be one more way for them to keep the bond between their family life and their birth

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