Congratulations on making the decision to build your family through adoption! The process of adoption can be a complex one, but it is one of the most rewarding decisions you will make. This packet has been specifically designed to provide you with information about International, or Inter-Country, Adoption. As you read through the steps involved, keep in mind that the staff of the Coalition for Children, Youth & Families is here to support, encourage and assist you throughout your journey. You are welcome to call us at 414-475-1246 or 800-762-8063, visit our family of websites or email us at info@coalitionforcyf.org at any time.
Getting Started
You probably have a lot of questions about how to start the process of adopting internationally. What are the requirements? How much will it cost? What are the differences between international adoption and other kinds of adoption? There are probably many more questions, and we are here to answer those for you!

What is International Adoption?
International adoption is when a married couple, unmarried couple or a single person from the United States adopts a child from another country. Each country has its own rules for whether they’ll allow single people, unmarried couples, people of a certain age, etc., to adopt.

How Can I Adopt Internationally?
International adoptions are done through a private licensed adoption agency. You can find a web link to a list of private adoption agencies in Wisconsin in the Resource Appendix of this booklet. Your home study needs to be done by a licensed adoption agency in the state of Wisconsin. However, you can contact a placing agency from any state to ask about potential children for your home. A placing agency is an adoption agency that has connections to the orphanages overseas. They are also the people who make the referral for your adoption. Some agencies can complete your home study and be the placing agency, while others will only do your home study and work with your selected placing agency. If they do not work with your chosen country, your adoption agency can direct you to a placing agency that you can work with.

The requirements for international adoption vary depending on the country you choose to adopt from. Below are some common requirements for international adoption. Keep in mind that every country’s specific requirements may be different.

- Home study, which is an evaluation by an agency to determine if you are able to be an adoptive parent.
- 18 hours of pre-placement training. (Continue reading to learn more about this topic.)
- Good physical and mental health without any serious medical conditions.
- Age. If you are a single parent, US immigration requires you to be at least 25 years old. Many countries require singles and couples alike to be no more than 45 years older than the child they are adopting. Again, this may vary depending on the country.
- Marital Status. Some countries require you to be married for at least two years before you adopt, or five years if you have previously been divorced. This may vary based on the country.
- Travel to the country. Many of the countries require one or both of the parents to travel to pick up their child. You may also be required to stay in the country for a specified amount of time before returning to the United States with your child. You may be required to visit two times.

“With less than 1% of orphans being adopted worldwide, please do not miss the opportunity to improve the lives of these children.”

-Sandy Destrampe, adoptive mom, founder and Executive Director, Children’s Hope Network
The Children
The types of children available vary by country. The children, at the time of adoption, are generally between nine months and four years old. In some foreign countries, you may have the option of adopting an older child or a child with special needs, as well as siblings. Many of the children from foreign countries are placed for adoption due to their families’ living situations. In some developing countries, where families live in deep poverty, the decision to place their child for adoption is thought of as a profound act of love and hope for a better life for their child.

Cost
The cost for an international adoption varies on the country you choose. International adoption can cost between $25,000 and $50,000, due to travel costs and other factors. For information on how to help afford adoption costs, see the Resource Appendix. Ask your adoption agency to specify all expected costs that would be associated with your adoption before you sign an adoption services contract with them.

Time Frame
This, too, varies based on the country you choose to adopt from. The entire process can take anywhere from one to three years to complete. This would include the home study, U.S. Citizenship, immigration service’s approval process and referral. Again, this will depend on the country you choose, the agency you work with and how fast you are able gather all of the documents needed.

Choosing an Agency
There are many steps involved in adoption. The first is choosing an agency and the second is choosing a country. When choosing an adoption agency, we recommend that you research several of them. In addition, try to get recommendations from families who have adopted. During your research, ask about the agency staff’s perspectives on the pros and cons of various countries. If you’ve already identified which country you’d like to adopt from, you want to be sure the agency works with that particular country. Ask the adoption agency if the fees outlined in their agreement include all legal documents for the country you choose, and if they help you make travel arrangements. For more information on how to choose an adoption agency, please see the tip sheet noted in the Resource Appendix.

Choosing a Country
When identifying your country of choice, you may want to consider the age, gender, race and medical needs of the children available. Many potential adoptive families also want to know how the children are cared for before they’re adopted. Some questions include:

• Are the children in foster homes?
• Are they in orphanages?
• What kind of information is available about the biological family?
• Does the information you gather match what you are looking for when you think about building your family through adoption?
• Are you willing to make compromises on some aspects to get the age of the child you want?
Maintaining Connections with Foster Families: An International Perspective

Jane and Doug first met their son's foster mother when they traveled to Guatemala in September 2003 to bring Rob home. They invited her to their hotel room, where, with the help of an interpreter, they visited for a few hours. They asked her at length about Rob's schedule, his likes and dislikes. They also got to see the easy, gentle way she interacted with their son—how he smiled for her and followed her with his gaze. Toward the end of the visit, she gave them a small photo album containing photos of Rob during the nine months he was in her care. Jane remembers feeling overwhelmed by the thoughtfulness, generosity and love that went into the gift.

It was Olivia, Rob's foster mother, who very subtly suggested keeping in touch during her visit with Jane and Doug. She told them that she has received hundreds of photos of her foster children over the years. She also gave them a letter, which contained her home address. Since then, Jane and Doug have sent her letters, gifts and photos.

For Jane and Doug, the willingness of their sons' foster families to stay in touch with them demonstrates the depth of their love for their boys.
Application Process
Once you have selected your licensed adoption agency, you will need to fill out your application. When the application has been approved, begin the immigration pre-filing process by completing the 1600A or 1800A form. The next step is getting ready for the home study.

Home Study
Home studies must generally include the following:

1. **Personal and family background.** This includes writing about and/or having an interview with agency staff about the family in which you grew up, how you were disciplined and your life experiences.

2. **Significant people in the lives of the applicants.** Similar to personal background, you will explain your relationships with co-workers or friends and your experiences with them.

3. **Marriage and family relationships.** Again, you will explain, either through writing or an interview, your relationship with your partner (if applicable). This includes information such as how you met and how you resolve conflicts. You will also talk about your relationships with your family members.

4. **Motivation to adopt.** What is your motivation to adopt? Is it to add to your family because you are unable to have birth children? Because you wish to help those in need?

5. **Expectations for the child.** What are your expectations for your children as they grow up?

6. **Feelings about infertility** (if this is an issue). How were you able to resolve them?

7. **Parenting and integration of the child into the family.** How do you plan on introducing the child to your family? How do you view the contact with your family and the child?

8. **Family environment.** This will involve your family dynamics and how you and your significant other interact and deal with conflicts, as well as your home environment (condition of the home).

9. **Physical and health history of the applicants.** All adoption agencies require a physical and a tuberculosis test. You will also need statements from your doctor(s) about your health condition.

10. **Education and employment.** This includes insurance coverage and child care plans if needed. You will be asked about your employment history and any stresses that come with your job.

11. **Reference letters.** All agencies require at least three letters of recommendation from three non-relatives. Some agencies also ask for recommendations from family members, school staff, etc.

12. **Criminal background checks.** The agency will run a criminal and child protective services check on you to be sure the child is entering a safe environment.

13. **Summary and social worker’s recommendation.** This is a summary of the social worker’s findings and their recommendation for a child for your family.

14. **Autobiographical statement.** This is essentially the story of your life. Did you get along well with siblings, parents, etc.? Why would you be a good parent?

15. **Income Statement.** You will need to verify your income by providing pay stubs, a W-4 or an income tax form.

This process normally takes about three to six months to complete. While you are completing your home study, or shortly thereafter, you can begin your pre-adoption training.
Leap of Faith

When Jacob and Angela discovered that they couldn’t have children biologically they immediately turned to adoption because, according to Angela, “we couldn’t even imagine not having a family.” The couple decided to adopt internationally and provide a home for an orphaned child.

Sons Daniel and Zach were both adopted from the same orphanage in Russia and, on the whole, Jacob and Angela found the orphanage to be in satisfactory condition.

“The caregivers were warm, friendly and happy to see the babies go to families,” Angela explained.

Having secured the family they’ve always wanted, Jacob and Angela are happy—and haven’t ruled out another adoption. For now, they cherish each day with Daniel and Zach and plan to take them back to their homeland in the future.

“We are very, very lucky,” Angela said. “We can’t imagine life without either of our children.”

Training Requirements

The training requirement for the state of Wisconsin is 18 hours of pre-placement training. This is a statutory requirement (Ch. 48.84 Pre-adoption preparation for proposed adoptive parents). Your first two hours of training will be covered by the orientation with your agency. This will include information on the purpose and function of the agency, a description of the support and services available and other post-adoption services. The remainder of your training will include 16 hours of core competencies covering the following areas:

1. Adoption and its Impact on Parenting and Family Dynamics
2. The Issues for a Child in Adoptive Placement
3. Loss and Grief for the Adoptive Child and the Adoptive Family
4. Attachment Issues in Adoptive Placements
5. Support and Resources for Adopted Children and Adoptive Families
6. Cultural Sensitivity in Adoption
7. Effects of Abuse and Neglect in Adoption
8. Legal Issues Relating to Adoption
9. Issues of Children Being Adopted From an Institutional Care Setting
10. Educational Issues in Adoption

Your adoption agency can help you locate resources available for training.
Paperwork
Once you have completed your home study and training requirements, you will need to complete the dossier, which contains all of the documents required by the foreign government to complete the adoption of a child. Law and custom will dictate which documents are required in the dossier and how they should be prepared and presented. Your licensed adoption agency will be able to help you find and fill out the correct documents and give you advice on preparing for this process. It can take between one and several months to complete this step, depending on how quickly you can gather the required documents and the processing times of the state departments and embassies involved.

When the paperwork for your home study and dossier are completed, your adoption agency will send the information to the country you have chosen. Once this is done, it is time to wait for your referral. The length of the referral process will depend on the country you are working with. Most countries have a waiting period of at least 12 months, with some reaching three years or more. Once the country of choice has identified a child for your family, you will receive a referral. With the help of your licensed adoption agency, you will accept the referral and complete the acceptance documents. Once your child’s visa is approved by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), you will travel to pick up him or her.

Travel
Some countries may require you to travel more than once during your adoption process. Check with your agency to see if they help to make travel arrangements and if there will be someone in the country to help guide you and translate, if needed, when you arrive.

The length of your stay may vary based on the country you chose. You could stay for as little as three days or 30 days or longer. Some of the longer trips may be broken into two trips if needed.

Back Home
Once you return home, you will have to complete your adoption—if it was not done overseas. Your worker will also begin coming to your home for post-adoption placement visits and reports. The final step is to go through the re-adoption process in your county. This helps with obtaining a birth certificate for your child, which, in turn, will help for your child when he or she is older for things such as getting a job or getting married. For more information, please read our What Is Re-adoption and Why Should I Do It? tip sheet.

Self Reflection
We know this is a lot of information to digest. You may be wondering if this is the right choice for your family, or if, perhaps, another form of adoption would be better. Take some time to assess your feelings. You may also want to ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I meet the requirements of immigration services and the country I’ve chosen? Am I open to adopting from another country?
- Does the time frame suit what I and my family were hoping for in an adoption? Are we willing to wait?
- Do the children who are available in the country I chose meet what I am looking for? (Am I looking for an infant? Younger child? Specific gender?) If not, would I consider adopting from another country or adopting a child who is a little older than I may have envisioned? Or what about adopting a little girl instead of a boy, or vice versa?

For more guidance in international adoption please refer to our website, www.wiadopt.org.
More questions?

If you have more questions, please call us at the Coalition. We are here to help! You may also want to contact some of the following parent organizations:

- Families for Russian and Ukrainian Adoption
- Families with Children from China
- Guatemala Adoptive Families Network
- North American Council on Adoptable Children
- Our Chinese Daughters Foundation

You may also want to learn more about support groups in your area.

Please remember that Coalition staff are here for you during every step of your adoption journey, whether it is getting started and researching, training or post-adoption services. We are here to help you!

Resource Appendix

The Wisconsin Adoption website, www.wiadopt.org, has several resources that may be helpful to you through your journey. By exploring the website, you can find:

- Tip Sheets (We recommend the tip sheets titled “How Do I Choose an Adoption Agency?,” “Checklist for International Travel When Adopting,” and “What is Re-adoption and Why Should I Do It?”)
- Support groups
- Personal Stories
- Information about making adoption affordable
- The Coalition’s Partners newsletter
- The International Adoption Handbook

If you need any assistance navigating the website, or any other information or resources, please call us at 1-800-762-8063 or 414-475-1246.
An umbrella of services over adoption and foster care: information and referral; recruitment, training, education and support for families and professionals.

Family of websites:
coalitionforcyf.org
wiadopt.org
wifostercareandadoption.org
postadoptccyf.org