Division 3 - Intercountry Adoption Information Booklet

Adoption Options

Mission Statement

Adoption Options is a licensed, not-for-profit agency that facilitates domestic and international adoptions, and provides information, education and counselling to birthparents, adoptive families, adoptees, professionals and the public.

About Adoption Options

Adoption Options Manitoba is a licensed not-for-profit adoption agency which provides a full range of adoption services to both birthparents and prospective adoptive parents. The *Adoption Act* regulates fees for services to prospective adoptive parents and that Manitoba residents may make an application for adoption. Adoption Options has helped create over 500 families through adoption.

Adoption Options is Licensed to Provide Services in the Following:

DIVISION 2 - PRIVATE ADOPTION

The birthmother chooses and meets the prospective adoptive family through the agency. Adoption Options also provides Direct Placement Services where a birthmother meets a prospective adoptive family before coming to the agency.

DIVISION 3 - INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTION

Adoptions from countries other than Canada.

DIVISION 4 - DE FACTO ADOPTION

A person may apply for the adoption of a child who has been in their care, control and maintenance for at least two years.

DIVISION 5 - EXTENDED FAMILY ADOPTION

A birthparent may place a child with an extended family member.

DIVISION 6 – STEP PARENT ADOPTION

A stepparent may adopt a child of their spouse.

Intercountry Procedures

In an intercountry adoption, Adoption Options acts as the local agency preparing all of the documents required to create the dossier. Adoption Options partners with facilitating agencies to provide the “in-country” portion of the adoption services.

Adoption Options has completed over 100 intercountry adoption placements.

STEP 1 - INITIAL APPLICATION APPOINTMENT

At this appointment the agency’s policies and procedures will be explained and questions will be answered. You will also be able to apply at that time. This appointment is approximately one hour long and is scheduled during office hours.

STEP 2 - EDUCATION SEMINAR

A mandatory two-day education seminar for prospective adoptive parent(s) provides detailed information on the adoption process. Topics include trans-racial adoption, loss, attachment, country specific information, resources and post adoption parenting. There will also be presentations from adoptive parents. The education seminar is held 3 times per year (January/May/September).

STEP 3 - ADOPTION FILE DEVELOPMENT

After attending the Education Seminar prospective adoptive parent(s) have all the information and documents that are required for their adoption file and dossier.

STEP 4 - HOMESTUDY

A file submission appointment is scheduled when the applicants are ready to move to the next step of having the Homestudy completed. The purpose of the Homestudy is to determine suitability, capability, and willingness to assume the responsibilities of a parent to a child. The Homestudy will include medical reports, criminal record checks, child abuse registry checks, prior contact checks and letters of reference. To complete the Homestudy there is a minimum of four interviews with a Social Worker and takes approximately four months to complete.

STEP 5 – APPROVAL

When prospective adoptive parent(s) have met all the requirements it will be determined if they are suitable, capable and willing to assume the responsibilities of a parent to a child – that is “Approved for Placement”. Upon approval Adoption Options ensures that all requirements of the specific country are met. Adoption Options forwards the complete dossier to the Manitoba Provincial Authority. The Provincial Authority must approval all Intercountry Adoption Dossiers prior to it being sent to the facilitating agencies.

PLEASE NOTE:

- Approval does not guarantee that a placement will occur.
- Should applicants not be approved, they may request a review.

STEP 6 – CHILD REFERRAL

Adoption Options receives and presents the child referral from the country to prospective adoptive parent(s) and assists in the process leading up to traveling to the child's country. The facilitating agency works with the adoptive family to make travel and placement arrangements.

STEP 7 - TRAVELLING

The facilitating agency works with the adoptive family to make travel and placement arrangements.

STEP 8 – POST PLACEMENT REPORTS

Adoption Options will complete the Post Placement report as required by the country. Post Placement visit occur in the family’s home.

Division 3 – Intercountry Adoption Fees

Fees for services as outlined in the Regulations supporting the *Adoption Act*. Applicants only pay for the services as they are provided. The information below includes approximate fees for each country. These include the fees for Adoption Options, the fees for the Facilitating Agency, and the fees in-country.

All travel expenses including air fares, hotel, ground transportation, necessary taxes and duties are not included in these fees and are the responsibility of the applicants. These fees are only for the adoption of one child, some of the fees will increase if adopting siblings. There is no guarantee that fees incurred with Adoption Options, the Facilitating Agencies and countries will not increase.

Adoption Options has specific fee structures for each country that outlines each fee and when it is due.

Intercountry Programs

The status of intercountry adoption programs can change frequently and programs will open and close or requirements from the country may change without notice. Please contact Adoption Options to check which programs are currently open.

AO can only work with countries where the adoption is finalized in that country. Adoptions that are finalized in Canada must be completed by CFS, for example the Philippines.

AO has chosen to work with these facilitators and countries for many reasons. AO will only work with one facilitating agency per country.

As the face of intercountry adoption changes AO is continually exploring new options for Division 3. However, it does take considerable amount of time to start a new intercountry program.

BULGARIA – THIS PROGRAM IS CURRENTLY ON HOLD

Adoption Options has partnered with Loving Heart International Adoption Agency in Toronto Ontario as the facilitator. This program started in 2013.

Requirements: Single Applicants or Married Couples
18 – 50 years

Ages of Children: 2 and up

Wait Time: projected to be 4 years and up
For older (7 and up) or special needs children the wait time may be shorter

Language: Bulgarian

Trips: 2 trips required
1st trip: 1 week to spend time with the child in Bulgaria
2nd trip: one month after court date to stay at least 10 days

Fees: Approximately $19,100 CAD & $9,000 Euros

INDIA

AO has partnered with Cornerstone Adoption Agency in Ajax Ontario as the facilitator. This program started in 2017.

Requirements: Single Applicants or Married Couples; couples must be married for at least 2 years

Age: To adopt a child up to 4 years old:
- Couple must have combined age of 90 or under
- Single applicant must be 45 years or under

To adopt a child between 4 and 8 years old:
- Couple must have combined age of 100 or under
- Single applicant must be 50 years or under

To adopt a child between 8 – 18 years old:
- Couple must have combined age of 110 or under
- Single applicant must be 55 years or under

There must be at least 25 years between the age of the child and age of the prospective parent.

Current Children: Families with more than 4 children will not be considered.

Children: 1 and up; sibling groups possible

Wait Time: projected to be 2 years until referral, then 8 – 10 months until child comes home

Language: Hindi, English

Trips: 1 trip required with a 1 – 2 week stay

Fees: Approximately $31,491 CAD

LITHUANIA

Adoption Options has partnered with Loving Heart International Adoption Agency in Toronto Ontario as the facilitator. This program started in 2015.

Requirements:	Married Couples Health: Not open to applicants who currently take medication for mental health issues
Ages of Children:	3 and up, sibling groups possible
Wait Time:	projected to be 2 years
Language:	Lithuanian
Trips:	1 trip required with a 3 – 5 week stay
Fees:	Approximately $17,000 CAD & $10,000 Euros

MEXICO

AO has partnered with Sunrise Family Services Society in Vancouver B.C. as the facilitator. This program started in 2020.

Requirements:	Mexican citizens prioritized Non-Mexican citizens can adopt children over 5 Single Applicants (Male or Female) or Married Couples over the age of 25. Couples must be married for at least 3 years. LGBTQ2+ applicants are accepted
Children:	2 and up; sibling groups possible
Wait Time:	2 years
Language:	Spanish
Trips:	3 trips required 1st trip: 3 – 6 days for interview with Mexican Central Authority and meet the child(ren) 2nd trip: 1 – 2 weeks to visit the child(ren), 1 – 3 months after 1st trip 3rd trip: 3 weeks for placement, 2 – 6 months after 2nd trip
Fees:	Approximately $25,860.00 CAD & $11,500.00 USD

NIGERIA – LAGOS

AO has partnered with Family By Adoption in Toronto Ontario as the facilitator. This program started in 2019.

Requirements: Single Female Applicants or Married Couples;
- Couples must be married for at least 2 years; one must be at least 25 years old and combined ages cannot exceed 100 years.
- Single applicants must be at least 35 years old and can only apply to adopt a child of the same gender.

Children: 1 and up; sibling groups possible

Wait Time: projected to be 1 - 1.5 years until referral

Language: English or African dialect

Trips: 2 Trips

Fees: Approximately $29,500.00 CAD & $10,185.00 USD

SOUTH AFRICA

AO has partnered with Family by Adoption in Toronto as the facilitator. This program started in 2014.

Requirements: Married Couples; married at least 2 years
History of one divorce only

Age: 25 – 55 years old

Health: Applicants cannot have the following medical issues
- Not noticeably overweight – BMI must be < 30
- History of cancer
- Mental health issue
- Incurable disease
- Serious physical disability

Children: 8 months and up; Sibling groups available

Wait Time: 1.5 - 3 years

Language: English

Trips: 1 trip required with a 6-7 week stay

Fees: Approximately $40,675 CAD

Frequently Asked Questions

What factors should I consider in making a decision to adopt from another country?

You must be able to accept the country's culture and have the patience to deal with possible frustrations of the intercountry adoption process, such as uncertain time frames and changes within the process.

Are there restrictions to who can apply?

Each country has its own requirements. There are requirements and restrictions on such things as age, marital status, family size, income and health.

What will we know about the child's history?

When you receive a referral you will receive pictures and the child's known medical and social history. With some countries you may be able to meet the birthfamily.

Can we adopt more than one child?

Only in the case of twins or siblings would applicants be able to adopt more than one child at a time.

Who are the children available for adoption?

The ages of the children available for adoption varies with each intercountry adoption program. Most children are over 3 years with the exception of Florida where the children are newborns. Some children have minor or correctable medical conditions. Sibling groups may also be available depending on the country.

How long will I have to wait to adopt a child?

This depends on the country and often cannot be predicted.

Do we have to travel to the country?

Yes, travel is required. The length of stay and amount of trips depends on the specific country requirements.

Greeting From Proud Adoptive Parents

7572 Miles and Back Again

We were told that international adoption is not for the faint of heart. We have now learned firsthand that it takes patience, dedication, determination, plenty of tenacity, and a whole lot of faith to navigate through international adoption. It is the ultimate rollercoaster ride, with many unexpected ups and downs, and twists and turns. Some may even wonder why we would venture into such an unpredictable and agonizing process...but our story gives the most precious reason why every single second of the ride IS worth it in the end!

Our first child, Sara, was brought into our family through an open-domestic adoption in 2004 when she was two-months-old. The process for Sara's adoption was seamless for us and we (naively) thought "we could easily do that again!" Little did we know that our international adoption would bring some of the most difficult moments (as well as joyful moments) of our life.

In 2005, we began waiting for our second domestic adoption. In the meantime, we also started thinking about the possibility an international adoption and what that might mean for our family. We had told ourselves that if Sara turned four-years-old and we were still waiting that we would start the international adoption process. After three years of waiting for a second domestic adoption, as well as a couple of disappointing "close calls" with birthparents, we decided to begin the steps to prepare a dossier for international adoption, and in February of 2008, we started the endless paperwork.

Our choices for selecting a country for our international adoption were multiple, including country requirements and processes, timelines, and child age/gender availability (among others) and in the end Ethiopia seemed like the right fit for our family. When we first began our adoption journey many years ago, we could only picture ourselves with an infant; however with much thought, time, research and change of heart, we decided that our family was ready, willing, and able to welcome an older child into our family.

On June 28, 2008, our dossier arrived in Ethiopia; we were officially "expecting" and the countdown to bring a child home could finally begin! When we began the process for our Ethiopian adoption, Canadian families were receiving child referrals (matches) within 4-6 months of their dossiers arriving in Ethiopia...fast forward two years and we were still waiting for our referral. There were several reasons for the delay of our referral. First, the programs' popularity increased so quickly that there became a backlog of waiting families. Second, several times throughout our process the Ethiopian government modified their adoption policies and requirements, which resulted in more time and resources to gather paperwork for children in order for them to be deemed "adoptable". Third, our international adoption agency declared bankruptcy in 2009 and it took six months for them to re-establish themselves.

Finally, on July 16, 2010, over two years after we began the process, our lives changed forever. "WE HAVE A BABY", I screamed as I hung up the phone after speaking with AO staff. Chad, Sara, and I jumped on the couch together and frantically opened our email. THIS WAS IT!!! The moment we would see the face we had only dreamed about until now. The face that one day

I would touch and hold and kiss and love. With Chad and Sara on each side of me, we opened the email and saw the picture of a wee beautiful stranger that would one day be part of our family. Chad, in astonishment whispered "A boy! MY boy!" Sara asked "Will that be my brother? We have our picture now Mommy!!" That night we found Sara sleeping next to the picture of her future brother.

Along with a few pictures, we also received information about his medical, social, and developmental history. He was 13-months-old at the time of our referral. We studied each document memorizing every single detail within them. We wanted so desperately to have him with us, but we knew that he was not our son yet and we were still months away from bringing him home.

As part of the Ethiopian adoption process, adoptive parents are required to travel twice to their child's birth country; once to meet the child and appear in Ethiopian court to become the child's legal parents; and a second time to bring the child home once all the court and travel documents have been processed, which can take up to several months to complete.

We were assigned a court date several months after receiving our referral and we decided that I would make the first trip to Ethiopia alone and we would travel together as a family to bring our son home. So in November 2010, off I went, halfway around the world, to meet my future son and become his mom!

He was as perfect in person as he was in all the pictures I gazed at for so many months previously... I spent only 30 short minutes with him on that week-long trip to Ethiopia, but made every second count – l held him, kissed him, stroked his face and hair, blew into his neck to make him smile, tickled his toes, and beeped his nose – a day I will never forget.

Unfortunately, our story takes a bit of an unforeseen turn at this point. There is never any guarantee that a family will pass court the first time (in fact, it is not uncommon for it to take several tries, which we were prepared for) and there can be many reasons for this. Usually if a family does not pass court, they are assigned another court date (which parents do not have to attend) and when everything is in order they become the legal parents of the child.

We did not pass court while I was in Ethiopia, but the circumstances were unique and unexpected, which resulted in much uncertainty in the future of our adoption. I had to fly home heartbroken at the thought of possibly losing my baby forever. The rules surrounding international adoption can change quickly and without any notice, so although we believed that everything in our dossier would be seen as acceptable in Ethiopia, further information and clarification was required in some of our paperwork, which took a great amount of effort and time to collect and gather.

With much work and persistence, three months after I first appeared before the judge in Ethiopia, including nine subsequent unsuccessful court dates, on January 28, 2011, we finally received a phone call with news that we were officially declared the legal parents of OUR SON, Seth! I think they could hear our shouts of joy and celebrating from across the ocean. Chad had his son. Sara had her brother. Seth had his family. And I had my miracle.

After working through a few more unexpected glitches in our adoption process, we received word on June 7, 2011 that Seth's travel documents were ready and we could finally bring our son home. Chad and I were on a flight to Ethiopia three days later...

On June 12, 2011, 11 months after we saw his face for the first time and two weeks after Seth's second birthday, Chad met his son for the first time and Seth joined our family forever.

The week we spent with Seth in Ethiopia was invaluable; our one regret was that we did not stay longer. It was the perfect time to get to know our new two-year-old son and begin our initial bonding and attachment without any distractions or disruptions. Although Seth had already experienced many of the typical baby-firsts without us, we created our own "new" firsts with him. One of the best feelings in the world was having my new son reach out and call me "mommy" for the first time.

It was also important for us to gather information about Seth's history while we were in his birth country. We spent time with his caregivers and traveled to his birth place and the orphanage where he lived for most of his life. One of the most humbling moments of the trip was being blessed with the opportunity to spend time with Seth's birthmother. We shared many tears that day as she said good-bye to her son and blessed us as his parents. She is an extraordinary woman; I am in awe of her strength, selflessness and love for her birthson. We hope that one day we may return to Ethiopia to show her what a fine man she brought into this world and to thank her for the privilege it has been to raise her birthson. We captured all these precious moments through pictures and videos to preserve the memories as best we could, as well as to help us share Seth's story with him as he grows.

We arrived home on June 19, 2011 and were greeted by family and friends welcoming the newest Canadian home! As Sara came running to us at the airport, we held both our children and became a family of four for the first time.

Our first year home with Seth has been full of many adjustments and milestones for everyone. For Sara, it was learning to share her things (including mom and dad) and not being the only-child anymore. For Seth, it was learning a whole new language and culture and trying to find his place in his new family and home. For us, it was focused on helping Seth to form a strong attachment to the two new strangers in his life that he now called mom and dad. We have come a long way in one year; we are in awe of our wee boy, with such resilience that he has flourished beyond our wildest expectations. Seth is a typical busy, never-stops-moving three-year-old boy who fills our life with endless love and laughter.

I tell my children that they grew in my heart - not under it! My children may not share any of my blood, DNA, or family history; yet they breathe life into me every day.

I wouldn't change one thing about this ride...

1313 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg MB R3G 0V3

204-774-0511

reception@adoptionoptions.mb.ca

www.adoptionoptions.mb.ca