

*Welcome to the following
children who have come home
with their families in the last
few months!*

Sofia
Matthew
Hayden
Madelyn
Juan
Santiago
Esmee
Li Xiao Yang
Zoe
Meaza
Samual
Hannah
Olivia
Dylan
Mahalia
Anastasia

Happy Holidays from the Executive Director

As we enter the holiday season, no matter what your beliefs are, this is for most of us a joyous season full of good cheer and celebration of family and friends. For many of you, you are celebrating family with a recent addition, and for many of you, you are waiting anxiously or patiently with hope of a family addition. We want you all to know that we feel honored to be part of your lives, to work and walk the adoption journey by your side, and to celebrate with each of you the joy of family and the joy of hope.

Cheryl

Placement numbers

In the last seven months a total of 52 children were placed with families with CHOICES families.

Placement specified by country

Ethiopia	8
USA	5
US State	2
Local	9
China	6
Russia	5
Ukraine	5
Ecuador	2
Nepal	6
Haiti	2
Taiwan	1
Malaysia	1

Staff Update

Back at CHOICES

Laura Carin is excited to be back from her year of leave. She is now the Social Worker for our programs in China, the Philippines, US State adoptions, and Vietnam.

Welcome to the following children who have come home with their families in the last few months!

Zoe
Dain
Ashenafi
Amelia
Tamasia
Lyla
Abdisa
Charlie
Abigail
Annabelle
Eli
Kai
Mekdes
Ling Qing
Mary Anne
Tommylia
Trejuanelle

Staff Update - continued

Leaving soon...

As of January 1st, 2009 Katrina Harrison, our Adoption Program Administrator for the Domestic, Ethiopia, Ghana, Pakistan, Taiwan, USA, Vietnam and Zambia programs will be taking a years leave to travel overseas to teach English as a Second Language. She is very excited about this opportunity and looks forward to returning to CHOICES in a year's time. For any questions or concerns, please contact your program's in-house Social Worker.

Practicum Students

Helena Haraldsson is our Social Work practicum student from Sweden. She is happy to be a part of CHOICES and enjoys learning new things about adoption and social work in BC and Canada every day. In January, three Social Work students will be joining the CHOICES team for their practicums. Welcome to you all!

Ecuador update

The Ecuador program has officially reopened! It was closed for a period of time, to allow for the Ecuadorian Adoption Authority to re-assess all agencies working in the country of Ecuador. As this is a country where formal accreditation is required, the number of agencies in the country has been significantly reduced, from 25 to 8. Our facilitator, Imagine Adoption (also known as Saint-Anne Adoption Centre) has successfully renewed their status in the country.

Some changes to the program, however, must be noted: Ecuador will no longer internationally adopt children under the age of 3 years. Clients will have to be comfortable with having a minimum age request of 0 – 4 years now. There are many children 4 – 6 years of age for any families comfortable with that age request. There are also pockets of different ethnic groups available such as Afro-Ecuadorian & Aboriginal children, and special needs children available (older children, minor rectifiable health issues, as well as health & cognitive disabilities). For clients requesting sibling groups, the minimum request is 3 – 5 years of age.

The Ecuador program is open to single women at least 25 years old and couples married at least 3 years. There should be no more than 45 years between the age of the youngest applicant and the age of the child.

For further information on the Ecuador program, please view our facilitator website at www.imagineadoption.ca, or contact our office.

Welcome to the following children who have come home with their families in the last few months!

Julie
Elisabeth
Hugh
Madeleine
Bryce
Mila
Hannah
Janniki
Kai
Jitu
Linda
Salina
Sergey
Yulia
Aleksandr
Calla
Raushan
Mila
Siao-Jyun

Nepal update

After being closed for over a year, the Nepal Government has decided to reopen their international adoption program, with new rules and a new process (which is still under development). After much deliberation and strictly on the basis that there are children in Nepal needing adoptive homes, CHOICES has decided to reopen its Nepal program. We expect this to be a high risk, lengthy program, full of complications. We will only be sending five dossiers initially to see how the program works and then we will decide if and when to send more. Nepal allows five dossiers a month from each agency. Please contact Laura Carin or Cheryl Fix to discuss this program.

How do drugs affect babies?

Today many people are aware that the birth mother's use of alcohol and drugs can have severe impact on the fetus. Are you considering adopting a baby who has been exposed to drugs during pregnancy? Do you want to know in what concrete ways a certain drug could affect the baby? OTIS, the Organization of Teratology* Information Specialists, is a non-profit organization who provide accurate and current information about the possible effects of a particular drug or substance on a pregnancy. You can visit them online at www.otispregnancy.org.

* Teratology is the study of birth defects caused by exposures during pregnancy.

A story of openness in international adoption

As a social work student here at Choices, I have experienced that openness is something many people have questions about. Many of us don't even picture that openness exists in international adoptions. However, Janice and her son Luke have an interesting story to tell about openness in international adoption. I was fortunate enough to have Janice share her and her son's story with us.

Could you tell me briefly about your child's adoption story?

Janice adopted her son Luke, now 2 ½ years old, from Ethiopia in 2007. Janice remembers her time with Luke in Ethiopia as unforgettable. She spent three months in Ethiopia before bringing Luke home, giving them the opportunity to experience as much of the local life as possible. To Janice, it was of particular significance to be able to return to the orphanage to spend time with the beautiful and selfless people who took care of her son for most of the first year of his life.

UPCOMING EVENTS

ADOPTION EDUCATION SEMINARS

Victoria

December 6, 2008

Quality Inn

9:00 – 5:00

Vancouver

January 10/11, 17/18, 2009

Vancouver English Centre

9:00 - 3:00

Victoria

February 7/8, 21/22, 2009

Quality Inn

9:00 – 3:00

Please register with Holly at
CHOICES

Throughout the process, however, she had a steady concern: that she was removing a human being from his homeland. Because of this, Janice does everything she can to keep Luke connected to his culture and his birth history.

What kind of openness does your family have with the birth family?

Although Janice hasn't met Luke's birth mother in person, she knows her name and tries to keep in touch with Luke's roots via the culture and the orphanage. While in Ethiopia, Janice spent time learning as much as she could about her son, his land and his culture. After leaving Ethiopia, Janice and Luke have been sending emails, pictures and letters to the orphanage. It was reported that the birth mother has visited the orphanage, curious about Luke and wondering how he is doing. The orphanage has then been able to show the birth mother pictures of Luke, which she has been happy about. After seeing pictures of Luke, the birth mother expressed that she would like Janice to cut Luke's hair. This is a way of communication and openness between Luke and his birth mother. This allows the birth mother to choose whether she wants information on Luke or not. In addition to giving the birth mother this option and providing Luke with as much information as possible on his birth family, this also keeps him connected with his roots. Janice is also planning on taking Luke to Ethiopia in the future.

Why is it important to consider openness in adoption?

Janice believes openness is important because she feels that it is Luke's right to know where he is from, not only culturally but also in regards to his biological family. When Janice adopted Luke, she felt guilt when taking him away from his birth family. By having at least a little openness, it will be easier for Luke to keep connected to Ethiopia in the future, if that's what he wants. However, Janice is aware that Luke might feel completely Canadian, and will not necessarily want this connection with Ethiopia in the future. Janice doesn't want to force Luke in any direction, and she does not want to force the birth parent either. All she can do is provide a necessary link so that both the birth mother and Luke can have the right to choose what they want to do with this relationship in the future.

Has your idea about openness changed during your adoption journey? If so, how has it changed?

Janice has always had an open attitude towards open adoptions. Before adopting, Janice was clear that she wanted to adopt from a culture that she had a great interest in, so that she would be able to keep connected with that culture even after the adoption. Prior to Luke's adoption, she didn't necessarily include the birth parents in those thoughts, as she was of the idea that it is often harder to maintain the connection with the birth parents in international adoptions.

1-888-479-9811

Please check CHOICES website
www.choicesadoption.ca

FREE ADOPTION INFORMATION SESSIONS

VANCOUVER
JANUARY 11
VANCOUVER ENGLISH CENTRE
2:00 - 4:00PM

VICTORIA
DEC 14
JAN 18
QUALITY INN
2:00 - 4:00

However, once she held the baby in her arms, she felt a huge responsibility, as she felt that this baby was also a part of someone else. She felt a responsibility to take care of him and do whatever she could to nurture the connection between Luke and his birth mother. Janice says that this is a connection that you can't deny.

If you would tell people one thing about openness in international adoption, what would that be?

Janice is of the opinion that it is up to every adoptive parent to think about and to decide how much openness they feel that they want for their child. However, Janice reminds us that there are other people involved in this process and not only you and your child. Ultimately the child and the birth parents have a bond that you can't take away. Nourish the bond if you can, and definitely don't break it.

Teen Adoption – a Life Cycle Event

Maris H. Blechner, adoptive parent and Executive Director of Family Focus Adoption Services, New York, came to Vancouver Island to speak about adoption in the beginning of November. When she was in Victoria, CHOICES was fortunate enough to have her share her thoughts and experiences with teen adoption.

Similar to younger child adoptions

According to Maris H. Blechner, teen adoptions have tremendous similarities to younger child adoptions, although they are different in the way that an adolescent in some respects is almost an adult who needs help here and now. On the other hand, these people are also small children who need help to complete tasks of earlier stages. If adopting a younger child is for parents who feel that they want to make a difference in the future, adopting a teenager is for those who want to make a difference in the near future.

Who can adopt a teen?

Some people think that you have to be an expert or an excellent parent in order to parent an adolescent. That is, according to Blechner, not at all what a parent is required to be. Instead, she points at a few characteristics that are important if you consider adopting a teen. Above all, you have to like adolescents and not be afraid of them. Another important criterion is that you consider that family is more important than individuals, as these kids are the neediest of all children in the Child Welfare System. They run the risk of having a very difficult adulthood if they exit the Child Welfare System without a family. Blechner also reminds us that, as a parent, it is helpful to remember their own adolescence. Understanding their own struggles from these years is also essential, as this is a sensitive and important period of life.

**** PLEASE REGISTER ****

*Thanks
to*

**all those who helped
make our Art Auction a
wonderful success!**

*Special Thanks
to*

Alcheringa Gallery

“The slower, the better”

According to Maris H. Blechner, the transition of a teenager is typically longer than transitions for younger children, as the adolescents are generally more frightened and need more time to be able to trust someone, because many of them have experienced several abandonments. You can't rush because you are building a life time relationship. Blechner says that the best way to support families in these situations is to educate them before they start the process and constantly remind them that going slow is better for the teenager. Also, the adolescents being adopted need to know “the slower the better”, and this makes them feel that they are protected and that they are not forced to make a quick decision.

Teens deserve a forever family

By being honest and by following the rules, adoptive parents can best support a teen through the transition, according to Maris H. Blechner. In her experience, the number one fear for teens is that they will be dumped again. However, Blechner reminds us that adolescents are desperate for permanent families. These kids deserve a forever family as much as younger children, especially because you spend more time with your family during the adulthood than during childhood. People believe that family time ends when you turn 19, but it is just beginning. Everyone needs someone to call if they have a car accident, when they get married and have children. They also need someone to celebrate the holidays with. In this respect, Blechner means that adoption is a life cycle event that includes more than birth, marriages or graduation. Adoption fills a hole.

Upcoming cultural events...

...in December:

Saint Barbara Day – BULGARIA (Dec 4)

This is the celebration of the saint who is believed to protect children from different diseases.

Russian Winter Festival - RUSSIA (Dec – Jan)

The Winter Festival in Moscow is filled with traditional folk shows, food specialties, folk games, cultural performances and live sounds of music.

December Evening Festival - RUSSIA (Dec)

An array of live classical music performances will take place throughout December.

Kulubi Gabriel - ETHIOPIA (Dec 28 (various dates))

The Christians make their vows to Saint Gabriel and the Muslims to "Gibril" (as it is known in the Quran). This is also a time for gathering, eating, drinking and partying.

Victoria Golf Club

Christine & Doug Allen

And of course all the artists who
donated their wonderful pieces of
art!

2009 Calendar

CHOICES is raising money to help support Orphanages and Transition Homes for Children in Ethiopia.

Global Reach Children's Fund is an incorporated, registered Canadian charity deeply committed to bringing hope, dignity and opportunity to people in the developing world- specifically women and children.

CHOICES 2009 calendar is now available. The cost of each calendar is \$10; each calendar that is sold will donate \$7 to Global Reach Children's Fund. The remaining \$3 will go to cover the manufacturing costs of the calendar.

Nine mornings festival – ST. VINCENT (Dec 16-24)

The streets are full of parades, fairs and competitions during nine mornings. This is how Christmas begins in St. Vincent.

...in January:

Beijing Longqing Gorge Ice and Snow Festival –

CHINA (Jan)

This winter event is a poetic and colourful fiesta of ice and light, with fire works, ice fishing and ice sculptures. This is easy accessible and located 80 km outside Beijing.

Chinese New Year (Spring Festival) –

CHINA (Jan 26-29)

The colours for the festival are red (for happiness) and gold (for wealth). Decorative papercuts and paintings are put up. There are also plenty of high-energy dragon dances, lantern shows, yangge dances and other entertainment throughout the celebrations.

Harbin Ice and Snow world – CHINA (Jan- Feb)

This is an impressive ice festival in Harbin, in the north eastern part of China.

Ganna (Ethiopian Christmas) – ETHIOPIA (Jan 7)

The celebration has a gently festive air, especially on Christmas Eve in Addis, where people gather to eat, drink and dance.

Arafat (Eid ul-Adhia) – ETHIOPIA (Jan)

This Ethiopian festival marks the return of the weary pilgrims from the Hajj in Mecca and the historical sacrifice of Ibrahim or Abraham, revered as the first Muslim, who was about to sacrifice his son to God.

New Year's Day – UKRAINE (Jan 1)

New Year's Day is the biggest holiday in Ukraine.

...in February:

Defenders of the Motherland Day - RUSSIA (Feb 23)

This includes ceremonies that commemorate the creation of the Red Army at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, after which the monument is surrounded with a spectacular carpet of flowers.

Malenitsa Festival (or Blini Week) - RUSSIA (Feb 23 – Mar 1)

This is a way of celebrating the end of winter and the on-coming spring.

Please check out the website for more information:

www.choicesadoption.ca

www.nopoverty.ca

**HAPPY
HOLIDAYS!**

Spring Lantern Festival – CHINA (Feb 9)

Across China, the Spring Lantern Festival celebrates the first full moon of the Chinese New Year. In Hong Kong, hundreds of locals take to the streets with lanterns, representing everything.

Hong Kong Arts Festival – CHINA (Feb 6 – Mar 8)

Hong Kong Arts Festival is the premier arts event of the year, featuring dance, visual art, theatre and music.

Tibetan New Year (Losar) – NEPAL (Feb)

Tibetan New Year always occurs on the day of the February full moon. Parades are held, Buddhist monks give blessings and families have a day off work to worship together.

Nc'wala ceremony – ZAMBIA (Feb)

The Nc'wala ceremony in Chipata is a commemoration of the glorious deeds and victories over other tribes that the Ngoni people experienced on their journey from South Africa to Zambia.

...in March:

Chengdu Flower Festival – CHINA (Mar 11 (annual))

The Chengdu Flower Festival celebrates the start of spring with colourful plant displays in Qingyanggong Park in Chengdu.

...in April:

Easter Sunday (Paskha) – CHINA (Apr 19)

This is the holy day of the Orthodox Easter. It is marked by a ritual procession.

Bisket Festival – NEPAL (Apr)

This festival consists of three days of chaotic festivities to herald the start of the Nepali new year, which falls at the start of the lunar month in April.

Easter – ETHIOPIA (Apr)

Easter is more important than Christmas in Ethiopia, as death is more important than birth in the Orthodox Christianity. It tends to fall after Easter in the western calendar.

Easter Week in Quito – ECUADOR (April 5-12)

This celebration includes many spectacular events, such as a procession on Good Friday.

