



CHOICES

Spring/Summer 2006 Newsletter

Issue 8

*Every child deserves
a permanent and loving family*

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

Monique Markus
Bronwyn

Olivia Ismael
Anna

Joshua Julianna
Jenna

Rojina Robert
Kristina

Jack Elena
Natasha

Julia Mitchell
Asha

Kyle Kelsey
Emma

Angel Dmitry
Nicholas

Amaya Tyse
Will

Emett Isabella
Maya

Alexander Amara
Jade

Amanda Alison
Austin

Deanna Taiya
William

Rian Chloe
Anastasia

Nicholas Shanti
Cynthia

Taya Ethan

Orphan's Hope

Orphan's Hope is the first
Canadian charity

Message from the Executive Director of CHOICES

Sandra Scarth

We at CHOICES believe strongly that adoption works. It works for birth parents who are looking for a positive solution to an unplanned pregnancy, and for couples or individuals who are unable to have children or wish to add to their family. Most of all, it works for children who are waiting for a family in the child welfare system or in foreign institutions. These children need and deserve the permanence of their own family.

CHOICES began as an agency primarily placing healthy newborns with childless couples in a relatively traditional manner (although we have always done open adoptions). While we still provide this type of service, our work is ever evolving and has changed dramatically over the years. For example, we reviewed our domestic placements recently and found that over 80% are fully open with birth parents able to visit in the adoptive family home. This is a dramatic change from even five years ago.

We have also placed a number of older children with special needs, primarily from out of the country. Waiting families avail themselves of the US internet photo-listing sites and find children needing families. This year we facilitated placements of six children, (including two sibling groups) ranging in age from five to thirteen years. These have been challenging placements, requiring a lot of support, but far better that these children have the opportunity of a family than to age out of foster care.

We would like to be more involved in helping BC children with special needs find families, and have approached the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) to that end. We are being contracted to do a number of homestudies for waiting families for MCFD. We were also approached by an MCFD social worker to see if we had a family for an infant born with physical disabilities to his hands and feet. Within a few days, we were able to place this child directly from hospital with one of our experienced adoptive families. This is a trans-racial placement and is a fully open adoption, with the adoptive family visiting in the birth family home.

In a second situation referred by MCFD, we assisted grandparents caring for their son's seven year old child to find an adoptive family who live nearby. The grandparents are able to maintain their role as grandparents to this child in an open adoption.

We at CHOICES have a personal as well as a professional interest in providing responsive adoption services. Our staff and board include adoptive parents, adult adoptees and birth parents. Our practicum students often come with a specific interest in adoption, as do our volunteers. We have a 24 hour answering service and try to respond quickly when people contact us. I apologize if we have not been able to respond as quickly this year as in the past as our placements have almost doubled and we are running to keep up. We would love to hear from you, particularly if you would like to explore the idea of adopting older children.

Tax Credit for Adoption Expenses

Income Tax Information - New Adoption Tax Credit still waiting to be proclaimed

CHOICES wants to remind all families of the Adoption Tax Credit that allows adoptive parents to claim expenses related to the adoption of a child if adoption of child was granted in 2005 or later. The total expenses that can be claimed under this credit are \$10,000 per adopted child, and include such items as the fees paid to an adoption agency, and reasonable and necessary travel and living expenses of the child and adoptive parents.

However, families should be aware that because this tax credit has not officially been made law, they should consult Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA) for clarification prior to claiming their adoption expenses. A CCRA spokesperson recently advised the AFABC that while the adoption tax credit is part of proposed legislation, there is still a possibility that it might not become law. If that is the case, people who receive a refund for some of their adoption expenses may have it taken back at a later date. It is also not unusual for such proposed changes to be included in tax forms prior to them being passed into law.

Hopefully, the Adoption Tax Credit will be passed soon -- the legislation has all-party support.

Please refer to CCRA for more updated information about the Adoption Tax Credit.

dedicated to helping finance Canadian families wanting to adopt orphans around the world.

For further information please contact by phone (416) 757-4567 or visit their website

www.orphanshope.ca



Aliyah

UPCOMING EVENTS

ADOPTIVE FAMILY FUN DAY

Join other adoptive families at the following events

VICTORIA

June 25, 2006

12:00- 4:00pm

Centennial Park

SAANICH

- Pony rides

- face painting

and lots of fun and food!

SURREY

July 15, 2006

12:00- 4:00pm

Fleetwood Park

Surrey

- Water Park

- games

and lots of food and fun!

*These events are free
Just RSVP to CHOICES*

NACAC Conference

July 26 - 29, 2006

The North American Council of Adoptable Children will hold its 32nd annual conference in Long Beach, California

More details, visit www.nacac.org

Meeting Groups

CHOICES

Nepal Program Update

Laura Thompson and Anne Carin traveled to Nepal this February. It was a very productive trip, resulting in a much stronger and smoother adoption program. CHOICES clients need to travel only once to Nepal (before, two trips were required for the adoptive parents). We are very pleased with the level of communication we are able to maintain with our contacts in Nepal, and the efficiency of this new process.

There are thousands of beautiful Nepali children from 3 months of age and older available for adoption. Both boys and girls of all ages are abandoned, or given to the orphanages directly by parents who lovingly wish for their child to have a better life than is available in a country ravaged by poverty and political strife.

For information on our Nepal Program, please contact Laura or Anne at CHOICES.

Aliyah comes home

Dan and Marie drove to the USA to be present for the birth of their baby, Aliyah who was born on May 2nd 2005. They were very excited to meet the birth mother and start their new life as parents. Marie says, "we were feeling overwhelmed and emotional but we were relieved when we liked the birth mother right away." They were able to bring their new baby home just five days after the birth. Aliyah loves to eat all types of food and is growing more and more each day. She loves dancing and playing with other children. "It is amazing how many people are closed about adoption, when people meet Aliyah they see adoption in a different light. Hopefully we can change people's perspective about adoption to be more positive" says Marie.

Aliyah is the love of Dan and Marie's life and she also has been instrumental in changing the old ideas about adoption in their community.

Dan and Marie are currently in the process of their second adoption.

Russia Program Update

CHOICES Russia Adoption Program continues to move forward in great leaps and bounds as we welcomed home 26 children into their permanent families last year from Vladivostok, Perm and Kostroma. The program has grown significantly in the past year, with an increasing numbers of families choosing to adopt from Russia. The Russian adoption experience is a unique one, and is often not without its share of bumps along the way. However, accepting that adoption is a journey full of unexpected twists is the first step in becoming parents to an adopted child.

Most families are choosing to adopt from either Perm or Vladivostok, however we also completed our first adoption from Kostroma this year. Our coordinator in Perm, Maya, welcomes families with open arms and a sincere, warm smile. She is a very accomplished lawyer, and has worked in the field of international adoptions for many years. She provides great support to families who adopt from this region, and has worked miracles in finding children who perfectly match their adoptive parents. Perm has proven to be a very successful region for CHOICES families. While it is considered to be a "blind" region, in that very little information is provided to parents before they travel, families have received basic medical information and, in many cases, a photo of the child being proposed to them prior to going on their first trip to Russia.

Our coordinator in Vladivostok, Ludmila, is also very competent and cares deeply for the families and children whom she assists. She has facilitated the adoption of hundreds of many children, and remembers every one of them and even where they are living now! She is full of energy, and manages to get things done efficiently. Most of our adoptive families have at least one good "Ludmila story", and she plays a vital role in these families' adoption experience. Vladivostok adoptions have been occurring at a much faster, more frequent rate in recent months – the last family waited only one month for their child proposal! The Ministry of Education in Vladivostok, unlike Perm, provides the family with a full medical summary and picture of the child before a commitment is made by the adoptive parents to travel and meet the child. For families who wish to have their child's medical reviewed by an International Adoption Medical Specialist prior to travel, this region may be a better option.

Kostroma is also a region which we hope to continue to expand, and our coordinator there, Tanya, is a young, professional, very competent facilitator. At this time, Kostroma officials will allow applications from CHOICES families who wish to adopt children over the age of 5 years. There are many orphaned children in this region looking for permanent families.

We have also recently been accredited to work in the Novosibirsk region, and welcome the first family who wishes to adopt from this region.

We continue to try to work with the officials in Ekaterinburg to complete a CHOICES family's adoption who was proposed their child two years ago. However, to date we have been unsuccessful in bringing their child home, due to changes in process and paperwork issues. While we will continue to work towards completing their adoption, the problems in this region have resulted in CHOICES no longer sending families to Ekaterinburg to adopt.

In October 2005, Rachel Warren had the opportunity to travel to Russia to meet with the various

Waiting Parent Support Group

The Waiting Parents Group provides an opportunity for families to make connections, share stories, learn from others' experiences, and form lifelong friendships with other Adoptive Parents. Second Thursday monthly @ 7:00pm - CHOICES office in Victoria
No Sessions in July and August

Single Parent Group

Offered by AFABC
For more information contact Lyn at (604) 317.7359

Birth Parent Group
Offered by CHOICES
Contact Jae for details



Ben

ADOPTEE'S GROUP

CHOICES is offering adoptees in the Victoria area an opportunity to join a monthly discussion group in a supportive, friendly environment. This is a great opportunity to meet other adoptees, share experiences, or simply listen.

Adoptees are invited to come for refreshments and insightful conversation as we explore the many sides of life through the eyes of an adoptee.

If you would like more information, please contact Jae at CHOICES.

THANK YOU for the amazing contributions we have received from:

adoption officials in our regions, including Perm and Kostroma. This trip helped to boost CHOICES reputation as an ethical, professional adoption agency, and helped Russian adoption officials to understand the wonderful life that Canadian families provide for adopted children from Russia. Rachel also met with the Canadian Embassy staff to discuss CHOICES re-accreditation, which is due in May 2006. While CHOICES has met all of the requirements of the Russian Ministry of Education in Moscow, at this point we are uncertain as to whether there will be any delays in re-accreditation. We are hopeful that we can continue to work in Russia while the re-accreditation process unfolds, and are currently researching this option. Please refer to our website for updates on our re-accreditation status, or call CHOICES and ask to speak to Rachel or Agnes.

Fee Update

The Russia Program Fees are in the process of being changed. For those families who are already registered with our Russia Adoption Program, the fee schedule in effect at point of registration will continue to apply. However, for new registrations, some fees have increased. Please contact CHOICES for more information about these fee increases.

However, there **is** an increase to fees paid in Russia for **all** adoptive parents travelling on their first trip after April 30th, 2006. The fee paid to the Russia Coordinator has increased from \$4500 USD to \$5000 USD, paid over two trips (\$7000 for two children, \$9000 for three children). This fee increase is partly due to an increase in the expected donation made to the orphanages, and also to the declining value of the US dollar. If you have any questions about fees, please contact Rachel Warren at CHOICES.

Ben's Story

Doreen, Alan, Ian and Ben

The road of life has many twists and turns. Who would have thought that a posting on a Yahoo group could have sent us reeling down a totally unexpected road. In November of 2005 I had been casually reading the postings on the internet when one caught my eye. There was a posting about a 21 month old boy whose file was with FOI and he needed a family. Our file was already in China for a non special needs child but I had been interested in the waiting child program for a while. I called FOI and they said we could easily switch programs. My brain started thinking, we already have a 4 year old boy, and wouldn't it be nice to have two boys? Wouldn't his age fit in nicely with our family? Wait a minute, I already had baby girl clothes hanging in the closet and we painted the room mauve! My brain continued to argue with itself, what does that matter, this little boy needs a family and we need a little boy. We spent a frantic week researching his special need which is a cleft lip and palate and decided that this was something we could definitely handle. This little guy deserved a chance and his picture tugged at our hearts. So, we filled in a bunch more paperwork and took a sharp right turn.

On March 27, 2006 we met a scared little boy in a government office in Kunming. We were the only family there that day so it wasn't the chaotic, noisy scenario I had read about. When he came in, all I could say was, "oh my, isn't he cute!" I signed whatever pieces of paper they put in front of me because I couldn't keep my eyes off of him. By the end of the day's paperwork he was running around the office chasing his big brother and laughing, we already felt like a family.

We have been home now for almost two weeks and what a smart, healthy, happy little boy Ben is! Our biggest adjustment so far seems to be that I have forgotten what it is like to have a two year old in the house, the poor cat is still trying to find a safe spot to sleep!

Our incredible journey continues down life's twisting path.

British Columbia's Waiting Children Profiles

The following child is currently in BC's foster care system and is available for adoption. For more information, please call 1-877-ADOPT-07. This profile is provided by the Ministry for Children and Family Development.

Stuart

Birth date: August 1995 Cultural Background: European/North American

Stuart is an active young fellow who loves to keep busy and be involved in what's going on around him. He is articulate, intelligent and creative, and describes himself as kind, co-operative and respectful. Stuart is a real outdoorsman! He loves hiking, fishing and just being in the bush. Stuart is a polite, loyal and caring boy who is learning to interact positively with other children. His relations with adults are enhanced when he feels understood, nurtured and treated fairly. Stuart likes skateboarding, bike riding and would love the opportunity to play sports.

Stuart was exposed prenatally to drugs and has some behaviours in common with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. He takes medication on schooldays to help him manage better within the classroom. He receives learning assistance in math as well as some help in spelling, writing and printing. Stuart is developing some friendships at school and learning how to interact positively with his peers. He is a great conversationalist and extrovert who can be quite persistent, strong-willed and mischievous. When upset he sometimes becomes destructive. He responds

- ★ **THRIFTY FOODS**
Tsawwassen & Nanaimo
- ★ **JAVA TALK**, Ray for your hard work
- ★ **University of Victoria Social Work Students**, Fiona, Laura and Michael, during their Practicum in our office
- ★ **Birth Parents and Adoptive Families who have participated in our various events.** We really appreciate everyone taking the time to share their adoption stories

we greatly appreciate your support!



Dmitry

UPCOMING EVENTS

and information are updated on our website www.choicesadoption.ca

CHOICES
Suite 100
850 Blanshard Street
Victoria, BC V8W 2H2
Phone:
1.888.479.9811
(250) 479.9811
Fax:
(250) 479.9850
E-mail:
choices@choicesadoption.ca
Web:
www.choicesadoption.ca

well to lots of structure, consistency, humour and nurturing care.

Stuart would benefit from a family that is involved in outdoor and athletic recreational activities. He would love a family with pets, especially dogs. It is important to Stuart that he maintains contact with some birth family and his foster family.

First CHOICES family adopts from KOSTROMA Region

Marilyn and Richard returned home with their adopted son, Dmitry, in February. Dmitry is happily settling into his new home, and enjoys his new life in Canada. This was CHOICES first adoption to be completed in the Kostroma Region of Russia, an area approximately 600 km from Moscow. The process went fairly smoothly for the family, and the wait time from point of dossier registration to time of referral was short. The Ministry of Education in the Kostroma Region accepts adoption applications from CHOICES families looking to adopt children over the age of 5 years. If interested, please contact Rachel Warren at rachelwarren@choicesadoption.ca Marilyn and Richard's story is featured below.

My husband and I were the first Canadians to adopt a child from the region of Russia known as Kostroma. This region has played an important role in the complex history of Russia. We stayed in the city of Kostroma, which offers a number of historic sites of interest. Our son Dmitry, aged seven, was living in an orphanage some distance from the city. His orphanage houses children aged 4 to 18. Conditions are very difficult in these orphanages for older children as, unlike the "baby houses," few international adoptions occur, and funding is therefore extremely limited. Even basics such as heat and clothing are in short supply. It was only 5 degrees inside the orphanage when we arrived; all of the children inside were dressed in their outer clothing. After becoming aware of the conditions there on our first trip, we recruited donations from friends and work colleagues, and on our second trip we purchased many gifts for the orphans. I think their favourite may have been the 17 bicycles that our donors financed! The adoption itself proceeded very smoothly, and the CHOICES facilitator Tanya in Kostroma did an excellent job of taking us through the process.

My advice to readers considering adoption is to consider the option of adopting an older child from Russia. Our son Dmitry has adjusted with ease to life in Canada. He started school a week after his arrival here. To our surprise, he is quickly mastering English and is doing well in a non-ESL class with children his age. His social skills, intelligence and maturity allow for him to interact readily with other children, notwithstanding the language issues and his difficult background. Thanks no doubt in large part to the very kind staff at the orphanage, and the high educational standards in Russia, we have the good fortune to have a new child in our lives who exceeds our expectations in every way, and who seems to bring happiness and laughter to everyone who comes in contact with him. My husband and I would be pleased to discuss our experiences with anyone interested in Kostroma, or in older child adoption.

For more information on how to contact Marilyn and Richard, please call CHOICES or email rachelwarren@choicesadoption.ca

What adopted adolescents often wish they knew about their Birthparents

Laurie Elliot

- What are my birthparents' first and middle names?
- Where was I born (hospital, city)?
- What time was I born?
- Were there any complications at the time of my birth?
- Did my birthmother see me or hold me?
- Who else was present at my birth?
- What were the circumstances surrounding my placement?
- Did my birthmother pick my adoptive family?
- Did my birthmother know anything about my adoptive family?
- Did she meet my adoptive parents?
- What did my birthmother name me?
- Does anyone else in my birth family know about me? Who knows what?
- How old were my birthparents when I was born?
- Were my birthparents married when I was born?
- Where did my birthparents go to highschool, college?
- What religious backgrounds do my birthparents have?
- What is my racial/ethnic background?
- Did my birthparents marry each other or anyone else after I was born? Do I have biological siblings? Do they know about me?
- What do my birthmother and birthfather look like? May I have a picture of them?
- Are my birthparents still alive?
- Do my birthparents love me?
- Do my birth parents think about me? Did they ever regret their decision?
- Do my birthparents have any special talents, hobbies, or interests?
- What traits did I inherit from my birthparents? Personality? Looks? Talents?
- Did my birthparents write to me over the years (journals/letters in a file)?
- Are there any medical concerns I should know about?