



## RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES: ADOPTIVE PARENTS INTERNATIONAL ADOPTIONS

### Child centered

Journeys of the Heart's goal is to have a child placed with the adopting parent (s). The child's best interest remains the primary concern of Journeys of the Heart

### Expectations

Journeys of the Heart staff will:

- Strive to provide the best advocacy and practice with adoptive parent (s) enrolled in an international program
- Journeys of the Heart staff will strive at all times to maintain good communication and relationship with the adoption parent (s) as staff pursues the goal of placing a child with the adoptive parent (s)

Adopting parent (s) has the right to choose:

- Which, if any, Journeys of the Heart services they will apply for, and utilize if accepted for service
- Adopting parent (s) has the right to participate in any decisions about this service within the confines of Journeys of the Heart and US Citizenship and Immigration Services (US CIS) policy, State and Federal laws and sending country laws and regulations and/or facilitator policies.
- Adopting parents will receive services in a manner that is non-coercive

### Screening

Journeys of the Heart will screen all families who make application to the international programs. This screening is to assist Journeys of the Heart staff in assessing the agency's ability to help the family be successful in the program.

Screening tools may include:

- Journeys of the Heart application
- Home study
- Dialogue with the family

Journeys of the Heart may not utilize all the tools listed above, particularly if there is an issue that is identified early in the screening process such as history of sexual abuse.

Adopting parent (s) will be screened within two weeks of Journeys of the Heart receiving the application and all necessary accompanying documents. All families who are accepted or denied will be notified in writing within three weeks of Journeys of the Heart receiving all the necessary materials. If an adopting family is denied acceptance the letter will give reasons for the decision.

### Home studies

Journeys of the Heart can complete the home study for adoptive parent (s) residing in OR, WA and IL. Adoptive parent (s) residing in other states are responsible for completing a home study that will meet all of the necessary requirements for the sending country through either:

- A Hague accredited<sup>1</sup>, licensed adoption agency or
- A licensed adoption agency supervised by a Hague accredited adoption agency

An approved and complete home study written by a qualified social worker is a requirement to be fully approved to adopt from the sending country.

US Citizenship and Immigration Service (US CIS) approval and fingerprint based background clearance of the adopting parent(s) s are valid for 15 months in the case of Hague adoptions. For non-Hague adoptions US CIS approval is valid for 18 months and their fingerprints are valid for 15 months in case on non-Hague adoptions. Families are responsible for maintaining the immigration approval and fingerprints valid for CIS purpose. Families should request in a timely manner a home study update from their home study agency or from Journeys of the Heart and complete the CIS forms for re-application. Journeys of the Heart will track the expiration dates of home studies but ultimately it is a shared responsibility between Journeys of the Heart and the adopting parent (s).

### **CIS approval**

Adoptive parent (s) must apply for and receive CIS approval for themselves (I-600A) and for the child (I-600) if adopting through a "Hague" country, the adopting parent (s) apply for themselves (I-800A) and for the child (I-800). Journeys of the Heart will assist with advising adopting parent (s) on the forms and necessary requirements for CIS approval. Journeys of the Heart will track the expiration dates of the AI-600A or I-800A, but ultimately it is a shared responsibility between Journeys of the Heart and the adoptive parents. Check with your coordinator for expiration dates from "Hague" countries. Receipt of an approved home study and US Immigration and Citizenship Services I-600A or I-800A completes the admittance process.

### **Procedures and responsibilities**

Average time frames for any program can be given, but international adoption can be a frustrating process with unforeseen delays. It is expected that adopting families will want to and should feel free to contact Journeys of the Heart staff to request updates. They will be given the most current status of their case and /or the international program in which they are enrolled.

Journeys of the Heart staff will send regular updates.

It is up to adopting parent (s) to decide the parameters of the child they will adopt (age, gender, race, special needs) within the limitations of any given program. Adopting parent (s) may choose to decline the referral of a child. However, depending upon the circumstances, Journeys of the Heart or the source of the referral in the sending country may decide to discontinue working with the adoptive parent (s) without refund.

Journeys of the Heart cannot guarantee the health of any internationally adopted child. Institutionalization, lack of accurate medical testing, inaccurate reporting, and inadequate medical care, may well impact the child. Information is enclosed regarding medical issues of internationally adopted children. All potential adoptive parents must read this material.

If an adopting family's situation changes during the time they are waiting to adopt, they are to notify Journeys of the Heart immediately. Examples of changes in circumstances include but are not limited to:

- Pregnancy
- Adoption of a child through another source

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<sup>1</sup> The United States and a good number of other countries have signed and implemented the Hague Convention related to the protection of children and to safeguards and best practice with respect to international adoptions. The United States accredits American agencies who show the capacity for applying the principles of the Convention. When Americans adopt from other countries who have implemented this Convention the adoption is commonly referred to as a "Hague" adoption. When Americans adopt from a country that has not yet implemented this Convention the adoption is commonly referred to as a "non-Hague" adoption.

- Addition of another family member
- Loss or change in jobs
- Divorce
- Criminal arrests or convictions
- Allegations of child abuse or neglect
- Change in residence

An addendum to the home study, which will include a reevaluation of the adopting family's ability to parent successfully an adopted child, will be necessary when changes occur and the adopting family wishes to continue with adoption plans.

Journeys of the Heart requires one year between the placement of a child through adoption and another child coming into the adopting family. In its discretion and keeping in mind the best interests of the children, Journeys of the Heart may not apply this policy depending upon the circumstances of the case.

### **Termination of relationship**

If an adopting family exhibits behavior to Journeys of the Heart staff or if Journeys of the Heart staff learn from another credible source of behavior that would be detrimental in parenting an adopted child, Journeys of the Heart may terminate the relationship, put the adopting parent (s) on hold while the issue is looked into, or before moving forward again require the adopting parent(s) at their expense to complete psychological testing or counseling that provides evidence that the adopting parent (s) are emotionally healthy and capable of adequate parenting. Testing of counseling results will be evaluated by Journeys Of The Heart's consulting psychologist or social worker. Adopting parent (s) will be notified of Journeys Of The Heart's decision two weeks after the additional reports, testing or counseling notes are provided to Journeys of the Heart.

Adopting parent (s) are free to terminate their relationship with Journeys of the Heart at any time. To do so adoptive parent (s) will contact their adoption coordinator and advise him/her of their decision so no further action is taken on their behalf. The adopting parent (s) will follow up with a letter advising Journeys of the Heart of the termination.

### **Mandatory Adoption Classes**

Journeys of the Heart holds mandatory ten hour adoption education classes for residents of OR, WA and IL. In OR and IL, the education requirements must be met before the home study can be completed, as per state requirement. If the home study is completed by an out of state agency, it is Journeys Of The Heart policy that the education requirements must be completed before the home study is approved by Journeys Of The Heart.

If the adoptive parent (s) reside outside of OR, WA and IL, they are required to view Journeys Of The Heart DVD's of the adoption education class and complete the materials provided, and submit to the Journeys Of The Heart's Oregon office for review and approval. This must be completed before Journeys of the Heart will approve the home study.

### **Service plans**

A service plan is developed with the adoptive parent (s) social worker and Journeys of the Heart staff. The service plan needs to be completed prior to the referral of the child.

The service plan is composed of goals and objectives that will help the adopting parent (s) be better prepared to parent an adopted child. There are "standard" goals such as furthering the adopting parent (s) adoption education, having a transracial plan in place for those adopting across racial lines, or learning basic baby care. There will also be individualized goals tailored to better prepare each parent. Past examples include saving money for the adoption or working and improving communication skills.

The service plan will come to the adoptive parent (s) as soon as the home study is approved by Journeys of the Heart staff. The service plan coordinator will contact the adopting parent (s) from time to time to check on the progress. This is done to ensure that the placement will not be delayed due to an unfinished service plan.

#### **Post placement and post adoption expectations**

The adoptive parent (s) are responsible for being available and for completing the number of post placement and post adoption reports required by the sending country, by Journeys of the Heart or by the parents' state of residence. If Journeys of the Heart completes the home study, the adoptive parent(s) will be contacted by Journeys Of The Heart staff to schedule the visits and reports. If the home study was completed by another agency, it is the adoptive parents' responsibility to contract with their home study agency or licensed social worker to complete the post placement and post adoption reports and to request that the reports be sent to Journeys Of The Heart and/or to the sending country in a timely manner.

#### **Communications**

Adopting parent(s) and their relatives, friends, and agents may not contact directly officials, facilitators, attorneys, or others directly involved in the adoption unless:

- 1) Journeys Of The Heart gives the adoptive parent (s) permission to do so
- 2) Communication is invited by the third party and is approved by Journeys Of The Heart

It is Journeys Of The Heart's experience that this direct contact by adopting parent (s) can jeopardize the parents' own adoption, adoptions by other parents, or Journeys Of The Heart's relationship with the third party. Journeys of the Heart will evaluate all facilitators, attorneys, officials or birth parents to provide families with an ethical and competent program. However, Journeys of the Heart cannot be legally accountable for the action (or inaction) of any third party who is involved in an adoption and is not under the control of Journeys of the Heart.

#### **Financial policy**

Adopting parents are informed prior to service delivery about anticipated fees/expenses, schedules for payment, manner of payment and conditions under which fees are refunded. Fees for parents adopting special needs children may be reduced by those caring for the child.

No refunds of the application fee will be given. This fee pays for the administrative costs of setting up the file, the social work supervisor and Journeys of the Heart international staff time to read and discuss the issued and take any other actions necessary to come to a decision.

Fees will be collected at intervals that reasonably reflect the services provided. There will be no refunds after the payment (s) have been made.

#### **Termination or withdrawal of service for non-payment**

Journeys of the Heart makes every effort to keep adopting parent (s) informed regarding payment of fees. Journeys of the Heart provides written schedules regarding fees and other estimated expenses to the adoptive parent (s) prior to the adoptive parent(s) admission to the international program.

1. Adoptive parent (s) will be sent a written notice indicating non-payment for a provided service and given a time frame upon which payment needs to be received by Journeys of the Heart in order to continue services.
  - a. If the family has not sent the application fee, the application process will not continue until payment is received. After 90 days, the family is required to submit a new application.
  - b. If the family has not sent their payment at time of referral/match, they will be given 30 days to send the payment. If the family has unexpected financial hardship or an emergency situation and cannot send payment, Journeys Of The Heart staff and the family will discuss options. It is

possible that the family will lose the referral if they cannot provide payment in a reasonable amount of time.

- c. If the adopting family has not sent payment at the time the dossier should be sent to the foreign country, the process will stop until payment is received. A delay of more than 90 days may result in termination of service
  - d. If the adoptive family has not sent their payment at time of travel, they will be given 7 days to do so. If the adopting family has reasonable problems and communicates them to Journeys of the Heart, options will be discussed. It is possible that the adopting family will lose the referred child if they cannot provide payment in a reasonable amount of time.
  - e. No travel approvals or final travel arrangements will be made without all necessary payments being made.
2. Adopting parent (s) who do not pay at the intervals stated by Journeys of the Heart and the above time frames must discuss the situation with Journeys of the Heart staff or they will be given a final termination notice.

### Availability

Journeys of the Heart offices in OR, WA and IL are generally open from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday except for holidays. Christmas week is generally a time when only a few staff members are available.

### Non-discrimination policy

Journeys of the Heart complies with state and federal laws and regulations as well as respecting the laws, regulations, and eligibility requirements of the sending country and legal custodians of a child when applicable. Except when restricted by law, regulations and policies of the sending country or legal custodian of a child, Journeys of the Heart accepts people who wish to adopt without regard to race, color, creed, religion, age, national origin, presence of any sensory, mental or physical handicap, or any other basis prohibited by local, state or federal law.

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Adoptive parent                      Date

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Adoptive parent                      Date