



making families happen

THAILAND

My son was adopted from Thailand. He was under the age of 5, adorable, energetic, inquisitive, and HIV positive. I had checked off HIV positive as a need our family would be comfortable with and I have never regretted doing that. He has been an incredible blessing in our lives.

Now that my son is home I'd love to advocate for kids who are HIV positive. Realizing that every child is unique, in our case HIV has not impacted our daily life aside from my son taking three medications twice a day. Thankfully the costs of his meds are covered through drug plans. He visits his infectious disease pediatrician every 4 months, where he has a full check-up and bloodwork. Our pediatrician says he is just like any other active little boy.

My son was well-cared for at his orphanage in Thailand. I visited him in the orphanage for a few days before I took custody and I think this helped his transition. I was worried about being able to communicate with him but he picked up English so fast! We became very adept at using gestures and pictures to help communicate when necessary. Thai people are so friendly that hotel and restaurant staff were always happy to help us translate something.

We were also incredibly lucky to have a personal guide in my son's home city and Bangkok. They were very helpful communicating with him and immeasurable things like buying snacks that they



CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

THAILAND...

thought might be familiar to him and that he'd enjoy. I was also grateful that we booked a hotel suite in Bangkok. It was great to have a separate bedroom for naptimes and a kitchenette. One of my biggest discoveries was that my son loves chicken noodle soup and I was so grateful that I'd packed a few pouches as a comfort food. He also loved milk so having a fridge was invaluable.



For me the biggest adjustments for our family haven't been HIV-related. Instead it revolved around my son being slightly older and adjusting to an older sibling. The kids had moments where they loved each other but there were many tears as they each vied for my attention.

It also took some time to shape some of his behaviours. I expected some temper tantrums and there were some, especially when shopping was completely overwhelming to him because he wanted everything. I was worried he would cry a lot because he missed people from his orphanage. If anything I would say he shut down a few times but he rarely cried.

I write this a few years after we've returned home from Thailand because I thought it would be helpful to hear how we're doing after the homecoming and once normal life has been established. I can say now that I would adopt a child who is HIV positive in a heartbeat. It's been a very manageable need for our family. I would also adopt an older child. Spending time in my son's orphanage was life-changing and I will never forget those faces.

Thanks to Children's Bridge for bringing my son to our family. And thanks to Pen for organizing the trip details. It was the trip of a lifetime.



Learn about
**The Children's
Bridge HIV+ Kids
adoption program**
on the next page!



The Children's Bridge HIV+ Adoption Program

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Some countries have less stringent requirements if the adoptive families is open to special needs – check with the Adoption Program Manager of the country you hope to adopt from to see if this applies to your situation.
- Families must live within driving distance, or be willing to make frequent trips to, of a major centre that offers specialized pediatric HIV/AIDS care and support
- Many private drug benefit companies cover ARV's and other necessary care. Other resources on provincial drug benefit programs can be found at: <http://www.drugcoverage.ca/en-ca/>

PROGRAMS:

- **India** – families must be open to a child 12+ months, singles and married couples are eligible for this program, some other program requirements may be waived (i.e. maximum age). Please contact Karyn Bakelaar for more information at karyn.bakelaar@childrensbridge.com.
- **Thailand** – children will be 3+ years at time of adoption, program requirements may be waived, and single applicants (female only) may apply. Please contact Darlene Catton at darlene.catton@childrensbridge.com for more information.
- **China** – we are currently working with an orphanage in China that is able to place children living with HIV into adoptive families. For further information, please contact Cathy Murphy at cathy.murphy@childrensbridge.com.

SUPPORTS:

- Lending Library – Members have access to resources stocked in The Children's Bridge Lending Library such as books and articles on issues such as: Pediatric HIV treatment and care, Disclosure and Confidentiality, Childcare and HIV, etc. For a complete list of resources on HIV please email Karyn.bakelaar@childrensbridge.com
- Mentoring Program – This mentoring program is currently under development but aims to link families who are already parenting children living with HIV with those who are in the process.
- Access to educational courses and online support forums

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



PROCESS:

- Attend a Children's Bridge Information Session (<http://www.childrensbridge.com/pages/infoseminars.html>)
- Become a Member of The Children's Bridge;
- Request a copy of the HIV+ Kids Adoption program Booklet
- Choose a country program that you would like to adopt from and that you meet all of the requirements for.
- Read, research and make connections! If you would like more information or additional resources regarding adopting a child who is living with HIV, please contact the HIV Program Manager, Karyn Bakelaar, at karyn.bakelaar@childrensbridge.com .
- Set up a time for your screening phone-call. All families considering adopting a child with special needs must first set-up a screening appointment with the HIV Adoption Program Manager, Karyn Bakelaar, at karyn.bakelaar@childrensbridge.com, as well as the Program Manager from the country from which they wish to adopt.

The purpose of this phone call is to:

- To discuss the implications of adopting a child with special needs;
- To ensure adoption, and more specifically special needs adoption, will be a good fit for your family;
- To provide you with additional resources and information you may require before choosing to proceed;
- To begin the screening process you must hold a current Children's Bridge membership;
- Ensure you meet the requirements for the country from which you hope to adopt, Canadian citizenship and immigration, as well as requirements your province of residence has for prospective adoptive parents;
- Receive and read the required reading and make an appointment for your screening appointment/conference call;

If you are adopting as a couple, **BOTH** members of the couple must take part in the entire screening process. The phone call will take approximately 20-30 minutes. If you are in the Ottawa area, and in person appointment is highly recommended.

Please note: This appointment is for a screening appointment only. We will not be able to provide retainers, nor guarantee you a spot in the adoption program of your choice at the time of your call or visit.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5



BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT HIV AND ADOPTION

- "HIV" stands for "Human Immunodeficiency Virus". HIV is a virus that attacks healthy immune system cells, because it needs cells of a living (human) organism to reproduce.
- HIV is not transmitted through sweat, tears, nasal mucous, saliva, feces, urine, shaking hands, kissing, insect bites, sharing cups, utensils, plates or food.
- HIV is transmitted through sexual fluids, blood and breast milk.
- The common cold virus can survive outside the body for up to 72 hours. The HIV virus can survive outside the body for minutes, or at the very most in a controlled laboratory setting, for up to two hours.
- From clinical experience up until this point, the average lifespan of a North American child who is HIV+ and is on antiretroviral medication (ARV's) is roughly the same as an uninfected child/adult in North America.
- Children living with HIV can be adopted through many of our adoption programs.
- Most of the adoption process does not change, although your home study will need to specify your openness to HIV.

Adoptive families who are considering adopting a child living with HIV should research the following issues:

- Disclosure
- Anti-retroviral's (ARV's) and pediatric HIV care
- Health care and drug coverage
- Stigma and discrimination

If you'd like more information about adopting a child living with HIV, please contact Karyn Bakelaar at Karyn.bakelaar@childrensbridge.com. Further information and resources can also be found at:

- <http://www.childrensbridge.com/pages/hivandkidsresources.html>
- <https://sinethemba2010.wordpress.com/>
- <http://www.projecthopeful.org/>



The Importance of Mentors

By Pam Tompkins, Grev & Saltanat Staniszewski

Connect-A-Kid is a non-profit mentorship program provided by The Children's Bridge Adoption Agency in Ottawa. Connect-A-Kid provides young adopted children with a connection to the adoption community through a mentorship program consisting of volunteer teen and young adult adoptees. All adopted children 5 yrs and older are welcome. Adopted children benefit from the camaraderie they share with fellow adoptees and their mentors and get to enjoy super fun activities with children who "get" them.

I was very excited to learn that this program was being offered by Children's Bridge Adoption Agency. My husband Grev Staniszewski and I adopted our son Saltanat from Kazakhstan when he was 18 months old. I knew that Connect-A-Kid was a program that would benefit Saltanat. In order to explain why I knew this, I would have to back up to when Salta was 2-5yrs old. At that time as a new parent of a toddler I was anxious to participate in any playgroup that was being offered. I went to indoor playgrounds and



Connect-A-Kid friends at Fun Haven enjoying one of our events with their teen mentors!

mommy groups and they were ok but Salta was very shy and withdrawn. I just chalked Salta's shyness to having lived in an orphanage until the age of 18 months. But something strange happened when we joined an adoption playgroup being held at Fisher Park community centre. The minute we walked in Salta stopped, looked around, dropped my hand and joined right in. It was like Salta knew. Somehow this little person knew that he was among children who shared a similar background. And Salta wasn't the only child whose anxiety and shyness melted at the adoption playgroup. I heard it over and over during our 3-4yrs attending.

Fast forward to today. Salta is now 9yrs old and will drop/cancel plans with friends, sports etc to attend the Connect-A-Kid playgroup. I thought it was because Cathy Murphy and the Volunteer Mentors plan exciting events with the kids such as an afternoon at Funhaven, sports in a park followed by a picnic, tobogganing and hot cocoa, bowling, baking etc.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

MENTORS...

But when I asked Saltanat to explain to me why he loves Connect-A-Kid I realize that my earlier suspicions were true. It goes beyond fun activities right to the core of what Connect-A-Kid is all about. Here are Salta's own words:

I love Connect a kid because the mentors are super nice and so are the other kids. Connect-A-Kid is about people who are adopted. It makes me feel like I am not left out and that I am not the only one who is adopted. There are a lot of great people who are adopted so I don't have to feel embarrassed. It is fun to be with older kids who are adopted. I think that the mentors and Cathy are super nice and fun to talk to and I want to grow to be like them. I want to be a mentor too someday.

The volunteers are absolutely fantastic as are the other children that attend. Salta is really forging bonds within the adoption community and thinks that the volunteers are the coolest bunch of teenagers (even though some are in their 20s). I just think that having this connection has really solidified how awesome adoption is and has provided Salta with some really positive role models. As much as we can tell our children how awesome adoption is, Connect-A-Kid reinforces that positive adoption message through bonds with people who share a common experience. I think Salta's words say it all!! Thanks so much Connect-A-Kid Ottawa!!

The mission of Connect-A-Kid is to strive for the following principles:

Responsibility:

The focus of Connect-A-Kid is to empower young adoptees to embrace and accept their background, their story, their heritage and their life.

Support:

Today's youth is strongly influenced by their support system. Connect-A-Kid wants to engage our adoptee youth and surround them with adult adoptees and members of the adoption community in order to encourage them to understand, feel, and question their emotions in a safe and inclusive environment.

Possibility:

Connect-A-Kid wants to provide opportunities for our adoptee youth to engage in their heritage and culture, connections with other adoptees nationally and internationally, and increase involvement and awareness of the adoption community.

Commitment:

Connect-A-Kid wants to promote positive, lasting relationships/friendships, meaningful, powerful interpersonal skills, and instill confidence, inspiration of the future.

Our Adoption Journey: Maddie and Andrew

Faced with the blank page and the herculean chore of recounting our adoption journey - an adventure that started on our living room sofa and ended up in a nursery in Hollywood, Florida holding our 4 day old daughter for the first time - it is very tempting to turn off the computer and go hide under a pile of coats, hoping this article will somehow just write itself. However, after several attempts at doing just that, it remains stubbornly unwritten.

So, to boil this task down to something more manageable, we thought we'd simply present a few moments along the way. We'll fast forward past how we ended up choosing adoption and start the story already in progress.

Morticians Need Not Apply

Sitting on our front porch, we pour over an assortment of papers. It's a motley collection of brochures, printouts and handwritten notes from all the different international adoptions agencies we've researched and/or visited in person over the summer. Our adoption practitioner has reminded us that before we can put the final seal of completion on our adoption profile, we need to make a firm decision on where we want to adopt from.

However, like any big commitment, we're afraid to dive in. Some programs have a lot going for them but with some kind of exception or caveat that gives us doubt. The Guyana program seems excellent but requires that you travel there, spend time with your child and then travel home for 6 months before reuniting with them. Maddie can't even wait until Christmas morning to open a present, so that one is a non-starter.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9



Early days in Florida



OUR ADOPTION JOURNEY...

Others have demands we simply cannot not meet. Certain countries limit their programs to parents whose combined age is below a specific number; others restrict application based on weight. Other limitations seem odd beyond understanding; if you're applying to adopt from Thailand and you're currently employed as a mortician, you're out of luck.

Through it all, the program that we kept coming around to is Florida. The timelines are relatively fast and the travel time is minimal. Our main concern is the cost. Florida is one of the most expensive and we'd be only be on the wait list anyway. However, everything else is so enticing we decide to take the leap. We go inside to celebrate with our cats who have been watching us through the window.

Been There, Done That

It's the second day of ADOPTalk and Andrew is ridding solo. Maddie felt ill the first day but pushed through. However, in an effort to keep her well, Andrew volunteers to do the second day on his own. This is not all bad for Andrew. He makes the drive from Toronto to Newmarket with the stereo on at his preferred volume (3 higher than Maddie likes) and stops at his preferred fast-food place for lunch (Taco Bell...Yeah, he's not proud of it either). However, Maddie is sorely missed during the information sessions, primarily because she, of the two of them, is the good little student. She takes meticulous notes and asks relevant, thought provoking questions. Andrew's notes look like chicken scratches from an illiterate and possibly drunk chicken.

By the end of the afternoon session, Maddie's absence is felt the most. Parents break off into small groups organized by what country they are adopting from. Each group has an individual guest, somebody who went through the program they are currently in. The man who talks with the Florida group is wonderful. He shares stories about his journey, shows the adoption profile his family made for prospective birth mothers and talks candidly about both the rewards and challenges of the Florida program. He offers good advice, a sympathetic ear and, at the end, his personal contact information.

Andrew rushes home that night with a heart full of optimism and a belly full of Taco Bell that he's increasingly beginning to realize may not have been the best idea.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



OUR ADOPTION JOURNEY...

Congratulations! He's a Girl!

One thing that everyone keeps telling you when you enter the adoption process is to expect the unexpected... things never go the way you think they will. These may seem like platitudes that can be just as easily applied to picking a new hairstylist, but they most certainly are not. Adoption is one surprise after the next.



Our biggest surprise comes on July 27th when we get the call saying our daughter has been born. We knew we had a child on the way. We received the amazing news that a birthmother had selected our profile a few months back. Since then we had been slowly making changes to the house, morphing our guest room to a nursery and making sure all our wires are out of reach. Our décor and the pace at which we made these changes were guided by two very specific pieces of information.

1. Our child was 'definitely a boy'
2. He was due sometime near the end of August

Imagine our surprise (go ahead, close your eyes and imagine) when we get the call that our boy was a girl and our girl is here. From that moment on everything moves into super high gear. The next four days are a blur of paperwork, doctor's appointments, phone calls, more paperwork, shopping trips and some light paperwork. When the dust settles and the smog clears, we find

ourselves passed out and exhausted in the ironically named Quality Inn in Buffalo, trying to get some sleep before our morning flight to Florida.

So Close, yet...

"We're just about to do a shift change. You can come back in about an hour."

Those are the words we hear from the nurse coming out of the hospital nursery just as we are about to go inside to meet our daughter for the first time. They are said without malice or intent to harm but they sting all the same.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

OUR ADOPTION JOURNEY...

While we've only been travelling in the most literal sense for a single day, we've been on the journey to parenthood for years and now with our goal at mere 3 meters away, we're told that it's going to be one more hour. It might as well be forever.

We push our faces to the glass and try to see over the tops of the tiny beds but there are so many babies.

"Which one is she?" we ask and are told she's one of the two in the back. We go downstairs and wait out the shift change.

After what seems like forever but was, in actuality, just under an hour, we're back upstairs and holding Beatrice for the first time. We're not only amazed how much hair she's got on her head but how much more she has on her forehead. Maddie holds her. Andrew feeds her. The staff is great and are content to let us hide off in the corner with her well beyond visiting hours.

We leave that night being told we'll be able to take her home the next day. We stop at a dinner for some desperately needed food. We joke that it's our last meal we can eat peacefully as a childless couple but in our hearts we know that's already not true. We may not have her quite yet but we are most certainly already her parents.

And the rest...

I wish I could tell you that every step on the road to adoption is an easy one but that would be patently untrue. The truth is that adoption can be a tough. You face a barrage of on unwanted enquires, judgemental attitudes, unfair policies and unending paperwork. For every night of eager anticipation and speculation, there are just as many nights of doubt, fear, confusion and seemingly endless frustration.



Thankfully, the moments that make it all worthwhile just keep piling up.

This is one of my favourites.

One thing we found out early is that Beatrice loves music. We keep the stereo in the kitchen and sometimes when she's getting a bit grumpy, we put on music and dance around with her in Andrew's arms. One particular dance party takes place on New Year's Day where Andrew bounces Beatrice while Maddie makes some kind of funny noise and silly face. All of a sudden Beatrice let out a laugh. Not a random giggle at nothing (a trick she'd pulled before) but a real little person's laugh. To double check this wasn't just a random laugh-like sound, Andrew bounces her again and Maddie made the same face. Sure enough, the laugh comes back even louder than the first time.

It's the best sound they've ever heard. It still is.



Welcome

WC CHINA

Welcome home to Rachel (Jiangsu Province), daughter of Michael and Jenny of Markham, Ontario

Welcome home to Lily Jiang Xia (Gansu Province), daughter of Andy and Jay of Calgary, Alberta

Welcome home to Ethan Le (Inner Mongolia Province), son of Kevin and Tuyet of Toronto, Ontario

Welcome home to Grace Mei (Zhejiang Province), daughter of Hao Ming and Winnie of Thornhill, Ontario

SOUTH KOREA

Welcome home to Hanalei, daughter of Peter and Lisa of Toronto, Ontario

Welcome home to Jayden, son of Marcus and Cindy of Markham, Ontario

INDIA

Welcome home to Raghav, born in Chennai, India, son to Venkatesh and Neela.

USA

Welcome home to Liam, born in Florida, USA, son of John and Aimee



Children's Bridge