

# Children's Bridge

INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION CONSULTANTS



making families happen

## Hana's Korea Homeland Journey

By Hana, 16 year-old Korean adoptee living in Ottawa

It didn't really hit me until we were called to board our flight in both Korean and English that I was going back. Back to the snow and back to my dog, and back home. But perhaps now I had two places I could call home.

Right now, being adopted is one of the largest parts of my identity. It has always been with me and affected my life in ways that may not seem evident if you don't know me well. But until my discovery of Korea through K-pop a couple of years ago, I had never really thought much about where I had come from or questioned my origins. I had always accepted that being adopted was just who I was and would always be, and I had one home, here in Ottawa. Then a wave of curiosity hit me like a blizzard in August. It was so unexpected and all I could do was just dive in head first. I made plans and started dreaming about how different my life could be. It was Korea I dreamt of. I would close myself off and create a whole world full of dreams.

Yet I knew I had to deal with the world as it is and sort out where I fit in. In hopes of discovering Korea as a real place with real people, I convinced my family to travel there

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Visit  
The Children's Bridge  
for more information  
on Homeland Visits!  
South Korea  
China  
Vietnam



Kimchi making school

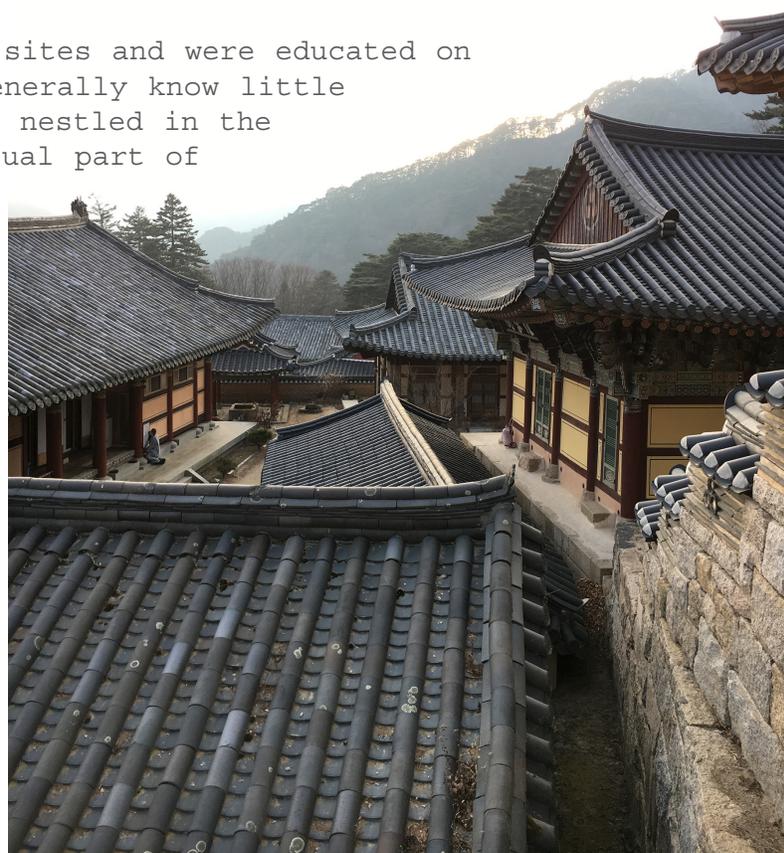
together. And together we shared a two week adventure, visiting Seoul and several other cities. We were there last December, when tensions were running high and the Olympics were still two months away.

The first thing I noticed about Korea was the sheer mass of Korean people. It sounds so obvious but I had never been exposed to so many at one time. Living in Canada you get used to being around a wide variety of people so it was surprising to me to be the one who looked like everyone else, and my parents and brother were suddenly the very visible minority. The second thing



is the senses get overloaded with new sensations. The food, the smells, even the signs were all so different than what I was used to. And the cold damp wind from the East Sea! Korea in December has a lot to offer but the weather isn't one of them. We spent two weeks bundled up in layers and looking for ways to warm up for a while. It is a good thing Korea is stocked with thousands and thousands of excellent coffee shops. But somehow the cold helped us appreciate the stunning amount and beauty of the nature. The country is vastly naturalized with endless pine forests, interspersed with beech and oak; these are only the familiar trees. Then, of course there are all the ones we didn't recognize, the ones more specific to Korea and Asia. We want to see the forests in summer, and especially in autumn.

Throughout the trip we saw many historic sites and were educated on Korea's rich past; something Canadians generally know little about. We saw beautiful Buddhist temples, nestled in the mountains, which spoke of a deeply spiritual part of the people; museums, some more interesting than others, and we saw modern towers, giant malls, subways and bullet trains. But what we all were impressed by the most were the Korean people. The country was cold but the people were warm. For me it was an awakening and realization that Korea wasn't just a place I wanted to go to or could maybe go to in the future. It was a real place with real people, real food, great accomplishments and yes some real problems. It was a new home away from home.



*Beautiful Haeinsa Temple*

What struck a chord with me was the way people would automatically talk to me in Korean, despite my speaking only the very basics. Everyone looked like me.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

I hadn't been aware of being different in Ottawa until some of my classmates had pointed it out when we were younger. It was a great feeling knowing that I wasn't alone and there are so many people who looked and acted just like me. Even the way they ran in a sort of shuffley, small step-taking way resembled that of my own shuffle-run. I felt like a part of something. I felt like someone special, a cultural liaison between two worlds. Even before the trip I had begun to proudly present Korean food to my family and friends in hopes of sharing this new part of my culture with them. I blasted K-pop and sung words I couldn't pronounce properly at the top of my lungs because these idols, they felt like me. After the trip I felt even more that there is a special part of me that is mine to share. *CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE*



*A typical dinner spread*

*The Hanok we stayed in (Jeonju)*

It is the small things that seem to have stuck in my memory. Bussing to the Rideau Centre to go shopping for my best friend's birthday triggered the memory of taking the Korean subway for the first time and marveling in how efficient and clean it all was. The way the announcer would repeat the stations' names in four different languages including English. Words that I couldn't pronounce before were plastered across advertisements and taxis zooming by. And then, my wandering mind was back, and I was back in between my two friends on the bus in Ottawa.

This trip brought me peace of mind that I had thought impossible. I watch the Olympics with new eyes, looking for familiar sights in the background, cheering for two sets of athletes and hoping my Canadian friends are watching and better understand my fascination with my second home.

I still dream of Korea sometimes - that place of cold winds, hardworking people, K-pop and kimchi. But it seems like 14 hours away, dreams become reality.

I have two homes, and two parts to who I am - sort of like the yin and the yang you see on that flag.



*Hana Centre ice in Pyeongchang*



*Traditional costumes*



## Research Study:

### How the Outdoor Environment Fosters Attachment within Adoptive Families

Fanshaw students are presently seeking parents with children who are adopted, both domestically and internationally, between the ages of 2-12.

The purpose of the research study is to understand how the use of the outdoors supports attachment among adoptive families. In order to be considered for the study, it is required that you and your family use the outdoors regularly.

Your participation would consist of sharing your experiences in an approximately 60-minute interview via face-to-face, Skype, and/or telephone. Your participation in this study will contribute to the advancement and understanding of how to best support families of diverse backgrounds using the outdoor environment.

Download the Letter of Informed Consent at:  
<http://www.childrensbridge.com/data/2018FanshaweCollegeResearchStudyLOI.pdf>

Download the Consent Form at:  
<http://www.childrensbridge.com/data/2018FanshaweCollegeResearchStudyConsentForm.pdf>

Thank you for your time,

*Ellen Livingstone*  
[e\\_livingstone2@fanshaweonline.ca](mailto:e_livingstone2@fanshaweonline.ca)

*Samantha Smith*  
[s\\_smith232@fanshaweonline.ca](mailto:s_smith232@fanshaweonline.ca)

*Jahmoyia Smith*  
[j\\_smith266@fanshaweonline.ca](mailto:j_smith266@fanshaweonline.ca)

(Honours Bachelor of Early Childhood Leadership Students)



#### Sad News

It is with very heavy hearts that we share with you the tragic loss of Elaine Birnbaum-Bellevue.

Elaine was a CB Mom who adopted her beloved daughters Sally and Madison from our China program. Elaine volunteered for many years with The Children's Bridge organizing events for our families.

The Birnbaum family has kindly requested memorial donations be made in Elaine's name to Children's Bridge Foundation [www.childrensbridgefoundation.com](http://www.childrensbridgefoundation.com) and a friend of Elaine's has also started a gofundme campaign for Sally and Madison. <https://www.gofundme.com/elainegirls>



## The Intimacy Barrier in Adoptees: Responding to a child with a sensitive intimacy barrier\*

PREPARED BY: Dr. Catherine Horvath, C.Psych.  
Founder & Executive Director of Ottawa Centre for Resilience

- We all have something called an Intimacy Barrier, this is our protective boundaries around certain emotional topics like a conversation about our weight or physical interactions, that is personal space.
- And when someone crosses our Intimacy Barrier we find it threatening, so our stress-response systems, the parts of our brain and nervous system responsible for responding to threats, go off and we do whatever we feel we need to to get the violator back on the right side of our Intimacy Barrier.
- We may do this by yelling, swearing, threats, pushing, or hitting, or withdrawal, avoidance of social interactions or passive disengagement.
- For those whose early experiences were with inconsistent, unavailable, unpredictable, or frightening caregivers, as is common for adoptees, their Intimacy Barrier is more sensitive and has a lower threshold for activation than for those who experienced warm, responsive caregivers.
- That's because right from birth, children begin tracking and recording signs that people are safe or unsafe (known as relational cues, these include eye contact, touch, and tone of voice).
- Social interactions can be organized along an intimacy continuum from least intimate to most intimate (see Figure). This starts with casual interactions like with people on the bus to routine such as with a teacher at school to personal and finally intimate.
- If our early experiences are with warm, responsive, and caring adults we correctly catalogue relational cues that convey warmth and interest such as eye contact and facial expressions as positive and we are able to tolerate interactions along the intimacy continuum from casual to personal without feeling threatened.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Ottawa & area's only  
specialized mental health  
centre for childhood  
trauma, attachment,  
adoption, and high-  
conflict families.

**Assessment  
Treatment  
Consultation  
Training**

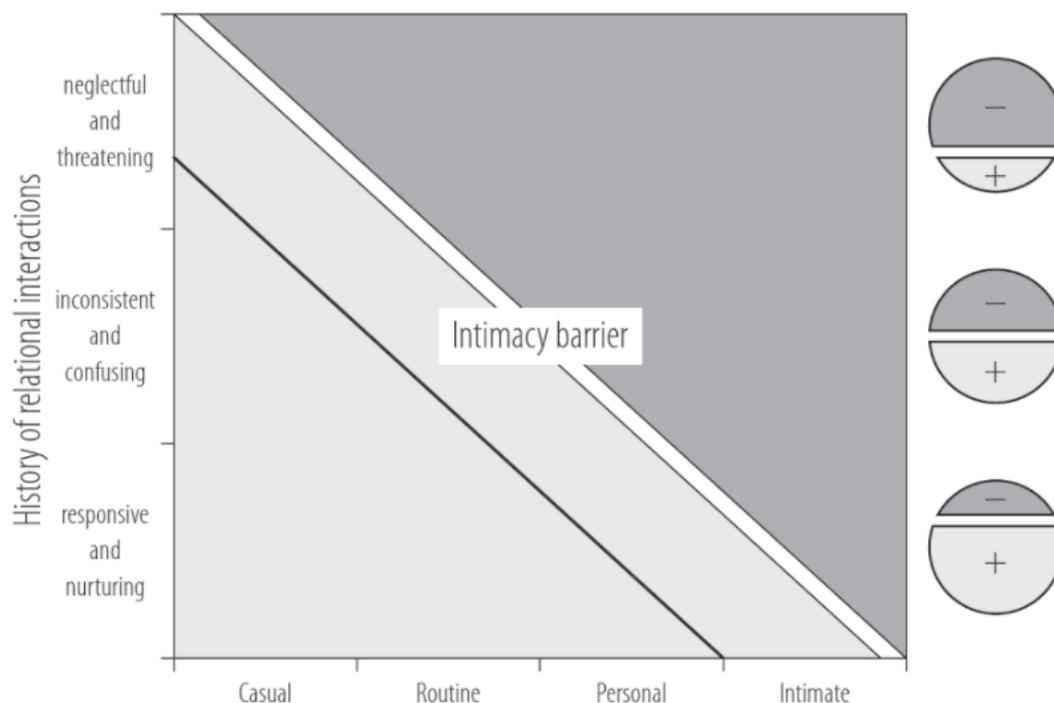
Providing timely,  
compassionate, and  
effective mental health  
services tailored to  
individual needs and  
strengths.

OCFR uses a brain-based  
approach to improving the  
problems children and  
youth come in with and  
increasing their daily  
functioning.

All of our services are  
grounded in an  
understanding of child  
development and how  
stress and adversity can  
derail healthy  
development.

**To book an appointment  
for your child or teen,  
call 1-613-714-0662**

*OCFR has a great list of  
resources for parents/  
caregivers, professionals  
and youth at [www.ocfr.ca](http://www.ocfr.ca)  
under resources.*



- However, if our early caregivers are unavailable, unpredictable, or frightening, we develop an internal directory that tells us that the associated relational cues are unsafe, but also that neutral or even positive cues are unsafe (we are wired to err on the side of caution when it comes to safety) and thus develop a high degree of relational sensitivity in the form of a sensitive Intimacy Barrier (see top part of Figure “neglectful and threatening”).

- In addition, these early experiences with caregivers influence brain development, especially of areas like the amygdala, which has an important job in activating our stress-response system (the fight, flight, or freeze response) to perceived threats.

- So, these individuals have both highly sensitive Intimacy Barriers and stress-response systems and often react to what are intended as nurturing, soothing, or socially engaging behaviours by others with verbally and physically aggressive behaviours or indifferent and dismissive attitudes; in fact, the more nurturing and caring the behaviours the more overwhelmed the individual feels.

- It is not that these individuals do not want connection and closeness, they do. But because of their early experiences personal and intimate experiences provoke fear; they can only tolerate interactions that they feel they have initiated and control.

- So what can parents and others do?
  - Your child will respond best to interactions when they feel they are in control and have initiated it
  - Be present and patient, give your child space but don't leave
  - Follow your child's cues

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



## Trauma-Informed Parenting: Supporting children & youth in crisis

PREPARED BY: Tiffany Peterson MSW, RSW  
Clinical Associate at Ottawa Centre for Resilience

- o Keep in mind that nurturing behaviours, especially gestures of physical comfort such as hugging or back rubbing are intimate and will be perceived as threats once the child's intimacy barrier has been crossed
- o Do not begin talking about consequences or appropriate behaviour or your feelings at these moments

- What is trauma-informed parenting? It is understanding the neurobiology behind a youth's behavioral and emotional responses and responding in a way that recognizes the impact early trauma and loss has on the developing brain.
- To understand this, we need to be familiar with the brain and how it develops. A child's brain develops from the bottom up, starting with the most basic primitive functions needed for survival, and progressing to the more complex functions such as problem solving, reasoning, and abstract thinking.
- A simple way to remember the basic structure of the brain is to think of it like a house:

- o The **"Downstairs Brain"**

- lower part of the brain
- first part to develop
- responsible for survival (Fight, Flight, Freeze)
- also known as the *"Lizard Brain"*.

- o The **"Upstairs Brain"**

- higher part of the brain
- last part to develop
- responsible for our thoughts, cognitions and executive functioning
- also known as the *"Thinking Brain"*

- The brain develops by forming connections, known as neural pathways. In trauma, the downstairs brain is highly activated as it is reacting to constant threats. Therefore, neural pathways are developed in the lower part of the brain, resulting in the brain becoming wired for survival.

- Even when there is no immediate danger, a child/youth with a trauma or loss history can become so sensitive and attuned to potential danger, they interpret all kinds of things (e.g., unexpected touch or tone of voice) as a threat, activating their downstairs brain and their Fight/ Flight/Freeze response.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

---

\*Intimacy Barrier concept and Figure used with permission from Bruce D. Perry & Child Trauma Academy, for more on this see: Perry, B.D., Hambrick, E., & Perry, R.D. (2016). *A Neurodevelopmental Perspective and Clinical Challenges*. In R. Fong and R. McRoy (Eds), *Transracial and Intercountry Adoptions: Cultural Guidance for Professionals* (pp. 126 - 153). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.



· Common triggers for children/youth with trauma histories:

- unpredictability or sudden change
- transition from one setting/activity to another
- loss of control
- feelings of vulnerability or rejection
- confrontation, authority, or limit setting
- loneliness
- sensory overload (too much stimulation from the environment)

· How we respond in these situations is the key to being trauma-informed!

**What can parents do?**

**(1) Recognize when a child/youth is in their downstairs brain**

- child or youth is emotionally overwhelmed/dysregulated

- fight/flight /freeze response (e.g., temper tantrums, yelling, screaming, running, hiding and aggression)

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



# Welcome

## SOUTH KOREA

*Welcome Home from South Korea to:*

Theodore Donghyeon, born August 12, 2016, son of Eric and Carmen of Toronto.

## INDIA

*Welcome Home from India to:*

Sukanti Munda, daughter of Shereeni in Ottawa

## ZAMBIA

*Welcome Home from Zambia to:*

Nathanael Banda, son to Graeme and Katherine of Toronto

## THAILAND

*Arrived July 16, 2017 from the Rangsit Babie's Home, Pathum Thani province, Thailand:*

Karan Luke, born January 10, 2016, son to Kris and Jessica from Labrador City, Newfoundland.

*Arrived July 14, 2017 from Chiang Mai, Thailand:*

Biya Sae-chang, son to Robert and Micheline and brother to Deklan and Haydon, all of Dunrobin, Ontario.

*Arrived October 20, 2017 from Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand:*

Elsie Taiah Phinitnan, born November 24, 2016, daughter to Tyler and Amber from Barrie, Ontario.



Children's Bridge

(2) **Remember, this isn't attention seeking behavior - it's connection seeking**

- they do not have the skills to regulate their emotions and they need your help
- they need you to be present-within eye sight
- they need you to be bigger, stronger, wiser and kind
- they need you not to personalize what they are saying or doing - this isn't about you

(3) **Minimal talking!**

- when children/ youth are in their downstairs brain they can't problem solve, reason or even express what is going on- the thinking part of their brain shuts down
- try not to problem solve or ask questions
- instead help them identify & label their emotions (e.g., "it looks like you're pretty angry right now, I know it's hard when you want to do something, and you can't...")
- be attuned and validate their emotions - this will not reinforce negative behaviors it will help them feel connected to you, understood and safe

(4) **Utilize sensory objects - orient child/ youth to the present by focusing on sensory experiences**

- give them something to hug, squeeze, or punch
- give them something hot or cold to hold or drink
- help them breath by blowing bubbles or doing breathing exercises
- get them to count out on their hand something they can see, feel, hear, touch & taste

(5) **Repair and reconnect when child/youth is regulated**

- draw child/ youth close to you and reassure them of your unconditional love
- do not use this as a teaching moment or a time to lecture or talk about the problem or consequences

· A helpful way to remember all of this is by remembering Dr. Bruce Perry's Three R's: **regulate, relate, reason**

