



Children's Bridge

The Children's Bridge Annual Public Report

Presented at:

The Annual General Meeting

Via Zoom

November 21st, 2020

Table of Contents

1. President's Report
2. Executive Director's Report
3. Treasurer's Report
4. Governance Committee Report
5. Program Committee Report
6. The Children's Bridge Staff Directory
7. The Children's Bridge Organizational Chart
8. Proposed Slate of Officers (2020/2021)

President's Report

It goes without saying that 2020 is a year unlike any other. Thank you to all our families for being so understanding and patient during the Coronavirus pandemic. The Children's Bridge organization adapted and responded quickly to the rapidly changing international situation. We are fortunate to have ended the year in a strong position, and are able to continue to serve the children and families we are so passionate about. This is no small feat for a non-profit organization that is subject to sudden changes and rapidly changing regulatory environments.

During 2019/2020, CB facilitated the placement of 14 children, and signed retainer agreements with 35 families. We saw the closure of the USA Adoption by Shepard Care program, followed by the opening of a new USA program with Heartsent Adoptions, and a significant increase in the India program. Along with our smaller board of directors, we trialed a less formal arrangement for the traditional committee structure of Governance, Programs, Finance. We must continue in our efforts to better align the board structure with the needs of the organization as we move forward with fewer board members.

In late 2019 we completed the modernization of CB IT infrastructure, which was particularly fortuitous given the events that began to unfold in February and March of this year. The investments in IT allowed staff to seamlessly transition to working from home. Late this year we decided to make this a permanent change, and closed the 1400 Clyde Ave. physical office location that we have occupied for more than 20 years. CB going forward will be home office based. This has worked well during the last eight months. Staff are in constant contact with one another and with our families.

Recruiting volunteers to serve on the Board is a challenging task, and I would like to thank our vice-chair Andy Thompson for her role in seeking out new board members. Andy will also be taking over the role of board Chair, and I know she will be highly capable in this expanded role. Many thanks also to Kathryn May, who is stepping down as a director, for her dedicated service to the board.

During my time on the board, I consistently witnessed the professionalism, strong ethics and child-first focus of our Executive Director Karyn Arnould-Bakelaar and our staff. None of what we do would be possible without their tireless dedication to CB and the children and families we serve.

After seven years since first connecting with CB, and after three years serving on the board, I will be stepping down at the end of my term. I have learned a great deal about the day-to-day operations and fantastic work performed by CB, its staff and board. I am extremely proud of what we as a team have accomplished, and am confident that we have set CB on a strong course both operationally and financially for the years ahead.

To all our CB families in-process, and those home with your children, I wish you much happiness and joy in the future. To the staff and board, thanks for your determination and hard work as you continue to move this organization forward.

Sincerely,

John Sutton

John Sutton, President of the Board, Children's Bridge

November 21, 2020

Signature: 

Email: john.sutton@childrensbridge.com

Executive Director's Report

Annual General Meeting November 21st, 2020

The words “unprecedented times” have been used extensively over the past 10-months, and for good reason. These are, indeed, unprecedented times in the world, for intercountry adoption, and for *The Children's Bridge* as a not-for-profit agency. We began our year operating “business as usual” and are wrapping it up with “nothing as usual.” And yet, we persevered, and managed to not only survive, but moved steadily towards “thriving” during these incredibly challenging times brought to our doorstep by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thanks to the many system upgrades and developments that were already being put into place before COVID-19 hit, our staff was able to pivot quite quickly from working out of a physical office space to working entirely remotely. This shift included not just our day-to-day operations, which involve dealing with international partners, couriers, foreign Missions here in Canada and family communications, but also staff meetings, team projects, and educational workshops such as AdoptTALK.

While there were some challenges to navigate as provincial, national and international organizations, agencies and entire countries went into lock-down, our staff quickly adapted to this new way of doing things and showed true professionalism and team-work as we problem-solved along the way. Not only did the staff adapt to new ways of doing the work we'd always done, but there was also true innovation as new courses designed to support families were developed, such as our *Circle of Security* parent training program, *Social Justice & Allyship: An Anti-Racism Series for Adoptive Parents of BIPOC Kids* (June – August 2020), *Social Justice and Allyship for Pre-Adoptive Families of BIPOC Kids* (September – November 2020), as well as developing a course specifically for adoption professionals for the Adoption Council of Ontario (ACO) entitled *Adoption, Anti-Racism & Social Justice: Tools for Adoption Professionals* (January – March 2021). We also recreated our information sessions for pre-adoptive parents (PAPs) to be hosted via Zoom, and now offer the opportunity for PAP's to attend virtually a *General Information Session* and/or *Country Specific Info Sessions* hosted by each Program Manager.

As always, we are fortunate to be very well supported by our committed, forward-thinking, and volunteer-based, Board of Directors (BOD). We are particularly grateful this year for the leadership of our BOD President, John Sutton, who will be stepping down this year. John's calm approach to any issue was always appreciated, not to mention the vast amount of time and energy he has spent on various projects over the past 2-years, including many of the system and IT changes and upgrades. Our agency and staff no doubt benefited greatly by having these changes already in place when COVID hit, and this made our transition to home-based offices virtually seamless. We are immensely appreciative of John's dedication to ensuring that our staff, and therefore families, were well-supported during his time on the Board.

We will also miss the presence, time and energy of long-standing Board Member/Officer, Kathryn May, who is also stepping down after many years of service on our Board. We sincerely thank-you for all of your time and commitment to the running of our agency. We could not function as an agency without BOD members such as John and Kathryn, and now look forward to the new leadership of Andrea Thompson, who has agreed to fill the position of BOD President/Chair. We will also be welcome new Board members to our slate of officers, and we look forward to the new perspective they will bring to how we operate as an Agency.

The changes brought to us all due to the COVID-19 pandemic led our Agency and BOD to make the decision to cease operating from our Clyde Avenue location permanently and move to remote working and home-based offices. The past few months have been busy as we prepared for this move, and a special thanks goes out to Lenore Cork-Lemay, TCB's Office Coordinator, as she took on much of the responsibility of coordinating our move after 20+ years at our Clyde Avenue location.

The Children's Bridge (TCB) currently holds a license to facilitate intercountry adoptions from South Korea, USA, Thailand, India (Mainstream and Special Needs), and Uganda (limited, one-time license). We were disappointed to learn of the news in September that our long-standing partnership with Adoption by Shephard Care (ASC), based in Florida, USA, would be coming to an end as they were ultimately unable to retain their Hague-accreditation this past year. However, we are pleased to be able to offer prospective adoptive families two other options to pursue an adoption from the USA: ACF Adoptions based in Miami, Florida, and Heartsent Intercountry Adoptions (HAI) based in California. We remain proud to offer two USA programs that are open to same-sex couples, as well as four options for single applicants (HAI, ACF, India and Thailand). We continue to proudly maintain a program that offers families the opportunity to adopt children living with HIV via our HIV+ Kids Adoption Program. We also continue to explore new program possibilities on an ongoing basis.

The Children's Bridge is proud to state that we continue to take our ethical practice very seriously. Our organizational goal is to provide adoption services with a mission to work in the best interests of the children we serve by creating a sustainable and ethical adoption practice. From start (intake) to "finish" (never) we strive to ensure that every aspect of prospective applicants' values and ethics are aligned with our core beliefs, and that each family's adoption process reflects these core principles.

South Korea:

TCB continues to work in partnership with the Korean Welfare Society, Inc. (formerly Social Welfare Society – SWS) in the Republic of South Korea to facilitate intercountry adoption for adoptive families in Ontario. The average age of a child at time of proposal is approximately 8 - 18 months, and the average age of most children at time of placement is 18 – 24 months.

While South Korea closed its borders for a short time due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they were able to re-open for travel with careful health and safety protocols in place as of May/June 2020. All adoptive families were appraised of the new travel rules and restrictions, and while adoptions took slightly longer in some cases, this allowed five of our waiting families to complete their adoptions this year despite worldwide travel restrictions. Some families have experienced delays due to the pandemic in obtaining Part Two approval in the IRCC process, or *Confirmation of Permanent Residency*, which takes place in Manila, Philippines.

At this time, our agency continues to receive child proposals, as well as news of court dates for families who have been matched with waiting children. Korea continues to enforce a 14-day mandatory quarantine at a designated facility for all families entering the country.

India:

Our India Program has grown rapidly over the past year, and we are thankful to have the opportunity to work with many wonderful families in both the mainstream and special needs program. We have made the decision to focus on our current families and ensure that they are not being “lost in the process”, and have placed a temporary hold on accepting new files for the India program. We will re-evaluate this decision in the New Year, and look forward to accepting new families at that time. We will continue to answer inquiries regarding the India program, and look forward to staying connected with interested families.

India imposed a strict lockdown on March 24th, 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Restrictions were slowly lifted, and one of our waiting families was able to travel to India to meet their son in November of 2020. We have also received one child proposal post-lockdown, and look forward to our program moving forward as India continues to slowly lift restrictions.

TCB currently has 34 families across Canada who are in process to adopt from India: 3 families have received child proposals, and the remainder of families are either waiting to be matched or working on completing their homestudy/dossier for submission to relevant authorities. Our agency also works with 9 families who continue to work on post placement reports and finalization.

Thailand:

The Department of Children and Youth (DCY) gave TCB a quota of submitting 4 adoption dossiers/applications during 2020. This quota does not include applications for families open to adopting children living with special needs or children over the age of 4. To date, our Agency has submitted 5 applications to the DCY, and will submit one or two more before the end of the year.

TCB received a quota from the Thai Red Cross Children’s Home (TRCCH) of 2 file submissions in 2020. To date, we have sent 3 files to the TRCCH. We have not yet received our quota for 2021.

We have 6 families working on their home study or dossier submission, including one family that will complete a relative adoption from Thailand. We currently have 5 families with child proposals who are waiting to travel.

Travel was suspended by Thai authorities in March of 2020, and no families have traveled since then. On November 10th, our Agency received information indicating that families can now commence travel; however, there are many steps that need to be followed to ensure safety protocols are followed, which has resulted in a few challenges to be overcome. We are hoping that families will be able to travel in January and February 2021 to meet their children. All adoptive families will be required to quarantine at specified hotels for 14-days, and obtain a negative COVID-19 test within 72-hours upon arriving in Thailand.

We currently have 26 family files in Thailand waiting for child proposals. Proposals continue to be received by TCB, but we have noticed a slight increase in the timeline in some cases (over 3 years).

There are 7 families who continue to work on post placement reports and finalization.

USA:

TCB completed two adoption via ACF in Florida this year, and both have been finalized in Florida courts.

Our agency was also excited to complete our first placement via HAI adoptions in October of 2020. This adoption has now been finalized, and the family has returned to Ontario with their new daughter. Our agency currently has 5 families waiting for a proposed match, and 3 families working on the completion of their dossier.

Uganda:

The Children's Bridge received a limited, one-time license in order to facilitate an adoption from Uganda. This family has been in Uganda for the past year to complete the mandatory fostering period, and is looking forward to a court date to finalize their adoption in early December 2020.

Staffing:

A special thanks is extended to our amazing staff, who remains a strong, committed, and dedicated team of professionals who continue to support our adoptive families throughout their adoption journey. This year was not without challenges, but our team weathered each challenge and continued to do their utmost to support our families through each hurdle COVID-19 sent our way. Recently, we welcomed one new team member, Emily Catton, to our staff, who began her role as Administrative Assistant in October.

A genuine thank-you is extended to:

- Darlene Catton (Thailand, ACF/USA) whose professionalism, keen eye for detail, and noteworthy experience in the field of adoption ensures our families are well-supported and well-prepared throughout their entire adoption journey.
- Bruno Jung-Millen, who began his employment with TCB in November of 2018 and manages our South Korea and HAI (USA) adoption programs. His innovation, strong work ethic and attention to detail ensures our families never miss a step during their complicated, and sometimes lengthy, adoption process.
- Our Office Coordinator, Lenore Cork-Lemay, whose communication, organization, and professionalism has been a genuine asset to our team. Her positive "can do" attitude is inspirational to our staff, as well as families who interact with her daily.
- Our financial department is now staffed by Wendi Mosher and Beth Rogers of Mosher Bookkeeping, and we are thankful for their flexibility as we worked through COVID hurdles, and their ongoing commitment to our agency's fiscal well-being
- Emily Catton, our new Administrative Assistant, who was able to jump right in and take over many tasks that required some patience and "learning on the fly". She has been a welcome addition to our team!

Each of our staff members are dedicated to well-being of *The Children's Bridge* as a whole, as well as to the families and children we work with and support. Each contributes countless hours of their time, expertise and personal experience to ensure families are supported from the moment they commit to growing their family by adoption, until these children reach well into adulthood. This past year I was particularly in awe of the flexibility, resilience, and ongoing commitment they demonstrated to our agency, programs, and families and children. Our strong, capable, and committed team remains our greatest strength, and I continue to look forward to working with each of them in the years to come.

Adoption Placements (November 2019 – November 2020):

South Korea: 5

USA: 3

India: 2

Thailand: 4

Total Number of Placements: 14

Our agency retained a total of 35 new families between November 2019 and the end of October 2020.

Governance/Board of Directors

The Children's Bridge is governed by a membership-elected, volunteer Board of Directors. Directors' terms are three years and Directors can serve for a maximum of two terms. Elections take place during the Annual General Meeting (AGM) every November. Each Board member has been instrumental in lending their time and expertise to ensure that TCB is a well-governed and sustainable organization now, and well into the future. I would like to take this opportunity to extend a heart-felt thank you to each Director on our Board:

- John Sutton (President)
- Andrea Thompson (Vice President)
- Martha MacLaine (Secretary)
- Raeanne Souliere (Treasurer)
- Kathryn May
- Hanna Stewart
- Lisa Cameron

We will say goodbye and thank you for your service and dedication to both John Sutton and Kathryn May, who will be stepping down from the Board following this year's AGM. We truly appreciate all of the time, hard work and dedication it takes to serve on the Board and to ensure TCB remains viable and sustainable in the quickly shifting environment of international adoption. We look forward to welcoming new Board members to our slate of officers in 2020/2021.

Although this past year was not without its challenges, I have never been prouder to be a part of this organization, and to work alongside so many committed individuals. While the upcoming year promises to contain ongoing challenges, I remain confident that it will also bring many opportunities for growth and evolution as well. Our agency, as always, continues to thrive due to the commitment that remains firmly in each of our minds as we tackle each new task – we are here to work in the best interests of the children we serve. We do this by continuing to maintain professional relationships with our in-country partners, strengthening our existing adoption programs, investigating new potential adoption programs and new ways of doing our work more efficiently and effectively, and building on our pre and post adoption services. This ensures our work reflects our

core values, which are to continue to provide ethical adoption programs that focus on serving children and to maintain best practices for all families who choose to build their family through adoption.

Respectfully submitted by,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karyn Arnault-Bakelaar".

Karyn Arnault-Bakelaar
Executive Director - The Children's Bridge
November 21st, 2020

The Children's Bridge
Annual General Meeting
November 21, 2020

Treasurer's Report


To the Members of the Children's Bridge,

Despite the impact on international travel throughout the pandemic, the Children's Bridge (TCB) remains diligent in uniting children with their forever family. In 2020, the agency and its Board of Directors have overcome a number of challenges; however, they continue to operate with a passion for connecting families, a focus on affordability, and the ability to provide a wide range of services that go above and beyond the needs of their adoptive families.

For the fiscal year ending July 31, 2020, The Children's Bridge generated a surplus of \$272,951 (unaudited) compared to \$64,856 in 2019. This positive result is mainly due to the increase in retainers from all programs. Another contributing factor is the recognition of TCB revenue related to Facilitation, Post Placement, and Admin Fees that had been sitting in the trust account from prior years. By showing these revenues as "Miscellaneous Income," we are able to maintain the integrity of the current year's bookkeeping records. We are still working through the family trust accounts and anticipate further allocations to "Miscellaneous Income" in the 2021 fiscal year.

The large excess in revenue enabled the organization to continue to build its cash reserve, which is in place as a level of protection in case of an unforeseen shut down. TCB is proud to be one of the only organizations that has a contingency fund in place. The cash and contingency fund increased year over year by 81%, with a value on July 31, 2020 of \$876,258 compared to last year's \$483,970. The Board placed \$250,000 of its cash into a high interest GIC in 2018 to generate interest income to support any unexpected deficits in future years. This amount has grown to over \$260,000 at the time of this report. The Board will be adding funds to this high interest vehicle upon maturity in December 2020 and will be implementing additional cash management strategies to increase its level of financial security.

Other initiatives for 2020 relate to TCB taking a proactive approach in balancing its expenses. As TCB staff have been efficiently working from home since March 2020 due to the pandemic, the Board decided that it was feasible to continue this past Covid-19 to minimize its large fixed cost of office rent. The agency officially terminates its lease at the end of November. The agency also continues to evaluate and seek licenses for program development to support its families. For the F2021 budget, the Board has put emphasis on the need to travel to all countries in which it has programs, as the personal connections developed in each country are vital in making the adoption process smoother for soon to be parents. Furthermore, the F2021 budget includes salary increases for the dedicated staff to reward their commitment to creating a sustainable, ethical adoption practice. Without the hard work of the staff and the volunteers, the Bridge would not be the largest international adoption agency in Ottawa. Thank you to everyone for contributing to the longevity of the Children's Bridge. May we continue to serve our community and work in the best interest of the children waiting to meet their forever families.



Raeanne Souliere, Treasurer

2020 Governance Report

The Governance Committee was active in supporting administrative staffing changes, and supporting the Board and staff of The Children's Bridge when needed. Our staff currently includes Karyn Arnould-Bakelaar (Executive Director), Darlene Catton, Bruno Jung-Millen (Adoption Program Managers), Lenore Lemay-Cork (Office Coordinator) and Emily Catton (Administrative Assistant). Bookkeeping and Accounting services continued to be provided by Wendi Mosher of Mosher Bookkeeping Solutions.

This past year brought a few staffing changes. With Wendi's support on the financial side, the additional bookkeeping services provided by Ayotunde Sode were no longer needed, and she was sent a notice of lay-off in March. We wish to thank Ayotunde for her 10 months of service at TCB and wish her much success in the future. In October Emily was hired to assist with post-placement reports and other tasks that will be of great assistance to our staff. Welcome Emily!

This year TCB had a smaller than usual board with only 7 Directors. With fewer individuals we moved away from committee-led work to a work-group model to identify and carry out projects of need and interest. The establishment of working groups also allowed current Directors to choose activities and project of interest to them. Although the COVID-19 pandemic meant that some projects were slowed or put on hold, the stay-at-home directives that were issued in mid-March served as a great trial run for online service delivery, and a home-based office model for the TCB staff. In consultation with the Executive Director, Karyn Bakelaar, the Board decided to make move to a virtual office permanent and ended our lease of the office space at 1400 Clyde Avenue. The move to a virtual office environment will offer our staff greater flexibility and ensures that all of our services can be accessed by families across Canada.

I would also like to take this opportunity to say farewell John Sutton and Kathryn May, who will be leaving the board this year. We recognize the dedication of Kathryn and John to building and supporting our families, and sincerely thank them for all they have contributed to the TCB Board.

In the upcoming year the Governance Committee will continue to support staff as the transition to their new home-based office environment, as well as any other issues, as they arise.



Andrea Thompson
The Children's Bridge Vice-Chair &
Chair of Governance Committee

2020 Program Committee Report

The Children's Bridge currently facilitates adoptions of children from the following countries: India, South Korea, Thailand, and The United States. Karyn Arnauld-Bakelaar manages the India program, Darlene Catton is the Program Manager for Thailand, and US adoptions through ACF, and Bruno Jung-Millen is the Program Manager for South Korea and US adoptions through Heartsent Adoptions International (HAI).

Over the summer we learned that our US partner agency, ASC, was not re-accredited. As a result, we had to close this program. TCB had four families in process with ASC at the time of this closure, however one family was in the process of closing their file and was able to complete this process. The other three families were thankfully able to move their files over to HAI.

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting world-wide travel restrictions has obviously made international travel difficult. In March, the Board made the difficult decision to delay upcoming court dates for four families in the South Korea program. This measure was taken to protect the families from unknown risks and financial costs during the early days of the world-wide pandemic. When dates were re-scheduled for June, TBC was still advising against travel, but families were permitted to go ahead with their new court dates once they were informed of the risks through a waiver. Other programs have experienced delays in the processing of paperwork, and travel restrictions due to the pandemic. We will continue to support our families through this difficult time and will always prioritize their health and safety and the health and safety of the children being placed with them.

As of September 2020, the numbers of retainers received for each program are as follows:

Program	Retainers from Aug. 2019 – Jul. 2020
India	15
South Korea	7
Thailand	6
United States	8

For 2021 we anticipate 30 retainers (8 each for South Korea, India, and the US, and 6 for Thailand).

In early 2020, the program committee started to explore the possibility of pursuing new adoption programs. As an initial first step, a survey of adoption programs offered by other adoption agencies across Canada was undertaken. Preliminary findings were shared with the Board. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, further research into new programs was put on hold. We plan to resume this 2021 research in 2021.



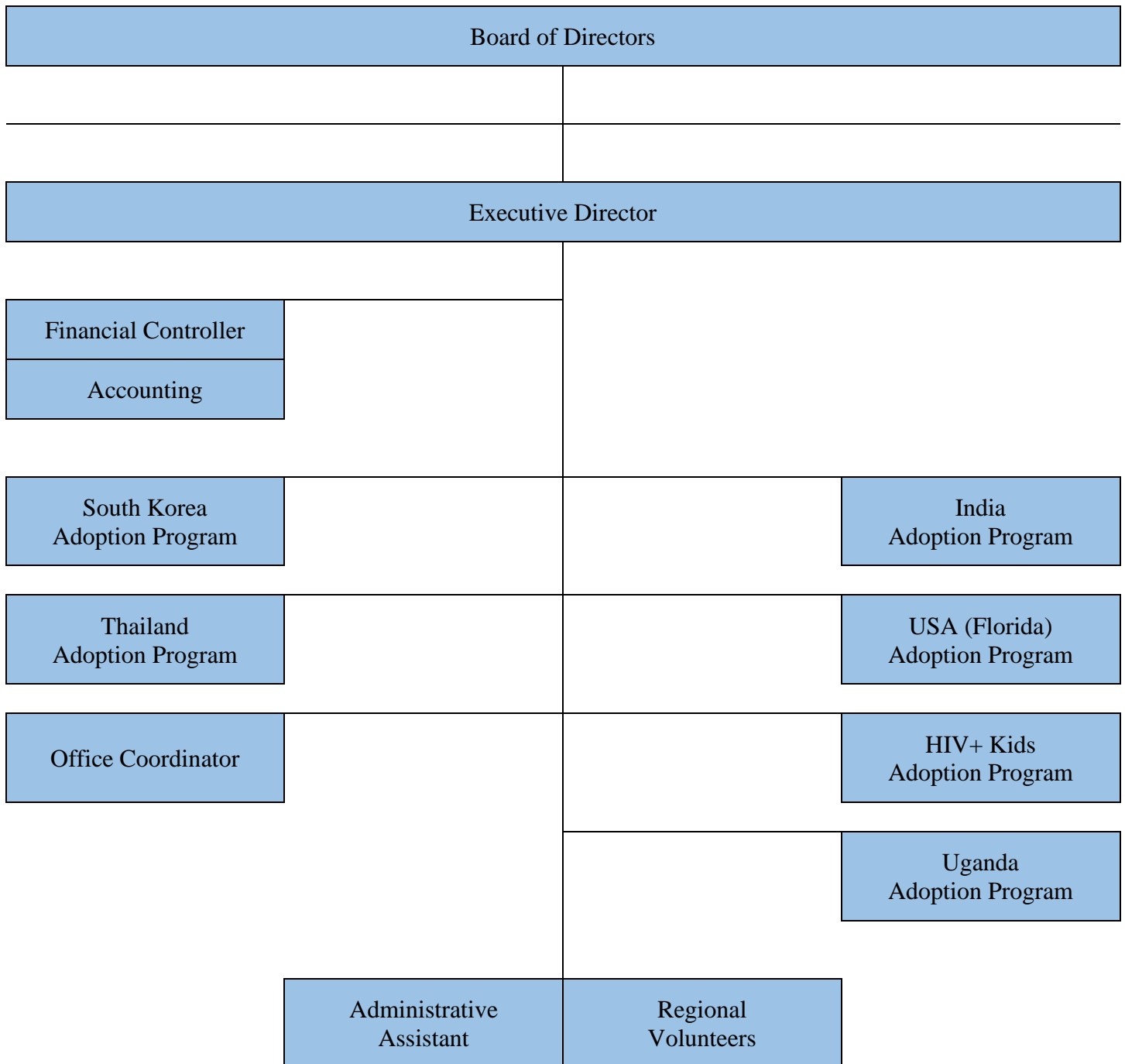
Andrea Thompson, Vice-Chair

STAFF DIRECTORY

Staff Person	Office Line	Email Address
Karyn Arnould-Bakelaar Executive Director, India, Uganda and HIV+ Program Manager, Pre and Post Adoption Services	613-226-2814	karyn.arnould-bakelaar@childrensbridge.com
Darlene Catton Thailand and USA Program Manager, China Homeland, Pre and Post Adoption Services	905-836-6776	darlene.catton@childrensbridge.com
Bruno Jung-Millen South Korea and USA Program Manager	613-807-4238	bruno.jung-millen@childrensbridge.com
Lenore Cork-Lemay Office Coordinator	613-226-2112	admin@childrensbridge.com
Emily Catton Administrative Assistant	905-392-8044	emily.catton@childrensbridge.com

Wendi Mosher -and- Beth Roberts Bookkeeping	613-293-4853	accounting@childrensbridge.com
--	--------------	--

Organization Chart (2020)



The Children's Bridge Board of Directors

2020/21 Proposed Slate of Officers

Executive

Andrea Thompson, Chair/President

TBD, Vice-Chair/Vice-President

Raeanne Souliere, Treasurer

Martha MacLaine, Secretary

Directors (Executive included above)

Lisa Cameron, Director

Colleen Clark, Director

Rebecca Manga, Director

Hanna Stewart, Director

Karyn Arnould-Bakelaar, Executive Director, Non-voting representative