



Children's Bridge

The Children's Bridge Annual Public Report

Presented at:

The Annual General Meeting

November 16, 2024

A Note from the President of the Board of Directors

Dear Members and Families of The Children's Bridge,

As we reflect on this year, it is clear it has been a period of meaningful transition and renewed focus for The Children's Bridge. While we have navigated changes both within our organization and in the broader adoption landscape, our commitment to the children and families remains steadfast.

With the addition of Anita James as our Executive Director and the expertise of our dedicated staff members, we look toward the coming year with optimism. We are ready to embrace new opportunities that will allow us to support and empower our families even more effectively.

Together, we will continue working to ensure we serve in the best interests of the children and provide pre and post adoption services and supports to our adoptive families.

Please find below additional information from the past year and our plans for the new year.

Highlights from the Past Year

- We continued to hold licenses in India, Thailand, and the United States. Our South Korea program remains on hold.
- We received 10 new signed retainers and had 14 child placements during the year.
- International Partnerships: Our team traveled to Thailand and India to strengthen our relationships with local organizations. These visits were well received by the organizations we work with.

A Warm Welcome

We are excited to welcome Anita James as our new Executive Director. Anita joined our team this past Spring and brings a wealth of experience in the not-for-profit sector to our organization. We are confident that she will lead us to new heights.

A Special Thank You

We want to extend a special thank you to our dedicated staff, who have stepped up during this transition period. In particular, we would like to acknowledge Darlene Catton for her exceptional leadership as Interim Executive Director. Her guidance and commitment have been instrumental in ensuring the smooth operation of our organization.

A Heartfelt Thank You

We would like to express our deep appreciation to all the volunteer Board members for their dedication and hard work throughout the year.

We are especially grateful to Raeanne Souliere as she ends her term for her many years of dedicated service on our Board of Directors, including her roles as President and Treasurer. We wish her all the best in her future endeavors.

We would also like to thank Amy Cooper for her service as Secretary. We are grateful for her continued commitment to our organization as she remains on the Board of Directors.

Looking Ahead

In the coming year, we are excited to continue our work growing our existing programs. We also plan to complete a 3-year strategic planning process to guide our future direction.

We are truly grateful to each of you for trusting your adoption journey to The Children's Bridge.

Sincerely,

Lisa Cameron

President/Chairperson, The Children's Bridge Board of Directors

Executive Director's Report

The Children's Bridge (TCB) has maintained high-quality programs and supports to our families during this past year. The staff and board have continued to work with integrity and compassion in order to deliver effective services during a time when the international adoption landscape continues to shift. Complex adoption processes, fewer children available for adoption, and longer wait times are just some of the challenges that TCB has had to address over the last few years, and this past year was no exception. Despite these challenges, our demonstrated expertise and dedication has effectively sustained our programs. We also maintained and continued to build strong relationships with key agencies and personnel within countries, adoption practitioners and adoption agencies, and the Private and International Adoption Unit with the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. I have been fortunate to join this reputable organization as the Executive Director this past May 2024.

A large part of our positive reputation is due to the competency and care of our staff who have been committed to the effective delivery of our intercountry adoption programs as well as pre and post adoption services to support our families, always in the best interests of the children we serve. Lenore Cork-Lemay has been the Program Manager for India and South Korea, and Darlene Catton has been the Senior Program Manager for Thailand and the USA. We were also grateful that Darlene was able to lend her many years of experience and expertise to undertake the Interim Executive Director role for part of last year. We also thank our Board of Directors for their ongoing dedication, guidance and oversight that they have provided with integrity and accountability.

Program and Service Updates

TCB continues to be licensed to facilitate adoptions from India, Thailand, the USA, and South Korea. However, the **South Korea program** continues to be on hold and has not been accepting new applicants while the country adjusts their adoption laws and procedures. In the future, adoptions in South Korea will no longer be processed through private agencies but through a central government body. The details regarding the enforcement ordinances and regulations have not yet been provided. We have met with all our families in progress with this program to keep them informed and we will continue to provide details as soon as further information becomes available.

Our **India program** continues to accept applications for both the mainstream and special needs stream from families of both Indian and non-Indian descent. This program's complexity benefits from the support of having two in-country coordinators who work closely with our Program Manager. As with all international adoption programs, the wait times for families has lengthened over the years to four-to-five years, which could be less if prospective adoptive parents are open to some level of special needs. There are many children awaiting adoption with minor to moderate special needs. Our India Program Manager, Lenore Cork-Lemay, travelled to India this past July. She was able to arrange valuable meetings with the Central Adoption Resource Authority, several orphanages, and

our in-country personnel. It was confirmed that wait times are longer for families in the mainstream program to adopt children aged 0-6, however, wait times are shorter for children over the age of six, sibling groups, and those with mild to moderate special needs.

Our **USA program** continues to be open to accepting a wide range of applicants, including single people and same-sex couples. While this is a costly program, it remains appealing for people who are interested in adopting infants with sometimes shorter wait times for families. The timeline for a proposed match continues to be one-to-three years, with a 15-20% failed match rate. TCB is now the only adoption agency in Ontario that facilitates adoptions from the USA. We continue working with our main in-country partner, Heartsent Adoptions Inc., and are now also open to working with other Hague accredited child protection agencies with older children awaiting adoption. As these situations can be complex, TCB's support to facilitate adoptions of older children from the USA is determined on a case-by-case basis.

In 2023-2024, our **Thailand program** was not able to send any mainstream files due to the increasing number of adoptive applicants and the fewer number of children in care. We have been advised that family files can be sent for those who are open to adopting children over the age of four and/or with special needs. The timelines from when a dossier is received in country to a proposal is between three-to-five years. Our Senior Program Manager, Darlene Catton, travelled to Thailand in January 2024. Her meetings with the central authority Department of Children and Youth, Thai Red Cross, and several children's homes made for a successful trip. It was confirmed that there are fewer young, healthy children awaiting adoption, and that many more children are born to mothers using drugs while pregnant. These updates from the trip were communicated to our families.

Additional information captured from our adoption programs over the past year include the following:

- There were 14 children placed with our families for adoption, which included:
 - Six children placed from India.
 - Six children placed from the USA.
 - One child placed from Thailand.
 - One child placed from South Korea.

*Children placed for adoption means that children are with their families in Canada, but there are still some outstanding elements of the adoption process that are required to be completed (e.g., post placement reports, citizenship, etc.).

- There were 11 completed adoptions with our families, which included:
 - Six adoptions completed from South Korea.
 - Three adoptions completed from the USA.
 - Two adoptions completed from India.
 - No adoptions completed from Thailand.

*Completed adoptions mean that children are with their families in Canada and all elements of the adoption process have been completed.

Our staff continued to provide general and country-specific information sessions regularly for people to obtain details about each of our adoption programs. These sessions as well as updated information on our website and program update reports emailed to our current families are tools we used to keep prospective adoptive parents informed. We also continue to update the content and speakers for our AdopTALK parenting workshop series that covers topics related to the first year after adoption, health matters, understanding and supporting early trauma, transracial and transcultural issues, trip preparation when travelling to the child/children's country, and more. We look forward to continuing to provide these informative, interactive workshops to support our families.

Moving forward, as we share and operationalize our new Strategic Plan, we hope to strengthen our capacity to facilitate international adoptions, enhance our pre and post adoption services to support adopted children and families, and build more resources and meaningful partnerships to advance our work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. James". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

Anita James MSW, RSW
Executive Director
The Children's Bridge

The Children's Bridge Board of Directors 2024/2025

APPROVED SLATE OF OFFICERS

Executive

Lisa Cameron, Chair/President

Barbara Leung, Vice-Chair/Vice-President

Alvin Chim, Treasurer

Juhi Jain, Secretary

Directors (Executive included above)

Karla Policelli, Director

Amy Cooper, Director

Phil Trinh, Director

Kaye Williams-Rankin, Director

Anita James, Executive Director, Non-voting representative

The Children's Bridge – Organizational Chart

