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July 2015

Memorandum to: Adoptive Applicants for South Africa

From: Gordon Lewis
Mission of TEARS (Ontario)

Regarding: June/July 2015 Program Update

This memorandum provides updates regarding the South Africa program from January 2015 to July 2015.

Child Proposals

The total number of child proposals presented to families during this period was 10.

Waiting for a Referral

Waiting for the referral of a child proposal is both exciting and also difficult. As families wait it may be helpful to understand our process. Once a family's dossier arrives in South Africa it is reviewed by our foreign partner agency social worker, Robyn Shepstone. Robyn works for Kwa Zulu Natal Christian Social Services (KZN CSS) which is our partner agency. Robyn becomes familiarized with new applicants as their dossiers are received.

Applicants who are waiting for a child proposal are listed as ready to be matched. At the same time, children who have been placed in care facilities in South Africa receive services, which may result in the child being available for intercountry adoption. Part of the work between the agency here and our partner there is the tentative adoption matching process between the two. At any given time within those two services, there are always several families who are tentatively matched with children. Part of the agency's mandate in facilitating intercountry adoptions is to present a child proposal of a particular child to applicants whose eligibility has been approved. Robyn manages the child proposal process for KZN CSS in South Africa.

An adoption match is confirmed and becomes an official child proposal when the South African Central Authority issues a letter confirming their consent of the proposed adoption. This is referred to as an Article 17 letter. Applicants are informed of a child proposal for their family only after our agency has received the Article 17 Approval from the South Africa Central Authority.

Address:

As part of their process, the Court in South Africa reviews dossier documents to ensure they are current. If applicants move after providing the agency with their dossier documents, the Court will require that a homestudy update is completed to reflect the new home environment/address and the issuance of an updated provincial Letter of Approval.

Homestudies are required to note the applicant's physical residential address. South Africa will not accept a homestudy with only a P.O. Box mailing address.

Guardianship plans:

Homestudy reports must contain basic demographic and relationship information about the people who the applicants have nominated to be their child's potential guardian, in the event that the applicant could no longer care for the child. It is suggested based on past experience that persons 60 years of age and older, such as prospective grandparents of the child, not be appointed as guardians.

Prematurely born children:

South African adoption authorities have requested that homestudies and homestudy updates include information about whether or not the adoptive applicants are willing, suitable and eligible to be matched with a child who was born prematurely. This information is being requested for matching purposes. Recognizing that prematurity can range from slightly premature to significantly premature, the following information can be used as reference and may assist the applicants and their practitioner.

Children who are born slightly prematurely (35+ weeks gestation) may have no health complications, while children born very prematurely (26+ weeks) may have a range of health concerns to be addressed. The agency has not experienced many adoption placements of children who were born very prematurely. We have had a few experiences of matching and placing children who were born slightly prematurely for adoption. Most of the children have not had any known negative effects of prematurity. Nonetheless, information regarding whether an applicant will not accept a child who is born prematurely at all, born slightly prematurely or born significantly prematurely, is necessary information to be contained in the homestudy for the purposes of matching.

For reference, below is a list of ranges of prematurity based on gestational age.

Born 26-28 weeks (+-800 – 1 kgs)
Born 28-30 weeks (+-1 – 1,5 kgs)
Born 30-32 weeks (+-1,5 – 2 kgs)
Born 32-34 weeks (+-2 – 2,5 kgs)
Born 34-38 weeks (+-2,5 – 3 kgs)

Applicants should do some basic research and consult their physician regarding the possible health and development implications of prematurity in order to understand any implications for the child and to include any relevant information in the homestudy.

For example, if the agency is in the process of matching a child who is entirely healthy yet was born prematurely, despite there being no health or developmental evidence of prematurity, in order to match the child with an appropriate family, the homestudy must include information about the applicant's range of acceptance of premature birth history in the child's background. If a family does not accept a history of prematurity that should also be noted.

Amended unabridged birth certificates:

Families do not need amended unabridged birth certificates for their adopted child in the child's new name before leaving South Africa. South Africa Home Affairs authorities, at the airport, accept the child's original birth certificate and adoption order as documented evidence. Agency representative Robyn Shepstone will assist applicants with gathering all documents required by airport authorities before they depart South Africa.

We would also like families to keep in mind the following information from our Memorandum distributed in March 2015:

Police Clearances:

RCMP and local police clearances are considered valid for 12 months in South Africa. Police clearances must be updated to have 3 months validity left on them at all times.

Passports:

The passport applicants use to travel must be the same passport that they present in their dossier for court. Therefore if you renew your passport after your initial dossier submission, you must advise the agency and provide 4 notarized copies of the updated passport to the agency, well in advance of travelling.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)

You must complete an application with CIC to sponsor the immigration of your adopted child, which can be done during the time you are completing your homestudy. The application needs to be updated after 2 years (if you have not gone to court to finalize an adoption by that time).

If your CIC application is nearing 2 years old, please contact CIC to request an extension to your application.

The next memorandum will be sent in January 2016. If you have any questions about the contents of this memo or regarding document preparation please contact Jocelyn MacDonald at (416) 449-0018 or info@missionoftears.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gordon Lewis', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gordon Lewis
Executive Director, Mission of TEARS (Ontario)