

ADOPTING FROM THE PHILIPPINES

Why Children Need Adoptive Families:

As is the case with most countries, children come into the child welfare system because their birth families cannot care for them for a variety of reasons. Sometimes the reason is poverty, sometimes it is extreme youth or family pressure, sometimes it is mental or physical illness. Sometimes birthparents make an adoption plan voluntarily, and sometimes the children are brought into care involuntarily, after abuse or neglect.

Oversimplifying a bit, Catholic Charities has noticed two distinct types of situations whereby children come into care:

- Children placed in orphanages (called Child Caring Agencies) immediately after birth, on a voluntary basis by their birthparents, many of whom provide significant information about their backgrounds,
- Children who come into care at older ages, due to some sort of family breakdown (death, illness, incarceration, abandonment), placed either voluntarily by their birthparents, or involuntarily through the child welfare system. The information about these birthparents, and about the children's history before their admission to the child welfare system, is usually very limited.

Where Are the Children Cared For?

There are three types of placement options for children in the Philippines:

- Government-run Child Caring Agencies, called "***Reception and Study Centers for Children***," or RSCCs. There are about 20 of these RSCCs located in the different provinces throughout the Philippines. Government institutions are typically larger, with fewer staff, than private agencies.
- Privately-run Child Caring Agencies, which may or may not be religiously affiliated. There are several hundred of these CCAs throughout the country. Private agencies typically have more resources to offer children in their care, such as private schooling, other enrichment activities, and better nutrition and medical care.
- Foster homes, under the supervision of the private CCAs. Only 5% of the children reside in foster homes.

What Are the Child Caring Agencies Like?

- **The government's RSCCs** are typically located on a few acres of ground, with an administrative building, several cottages, a dining room, and maintenance buildings. The children are divided by ages and genders into different cottages. Siblings may not be together in the same cottage. There may be up to 100 children at an RSCC. The staff work on a shift basis, and the cottage parents may or may

not live with the children in the cottage. Children attend school at the local public school, and may either walk or be given money to take public transportation. A typical day at an RSCC would be as follows:

- Arise at 6, personal hygiene, clean sleeping area
- Breakfast at 6:30
- Depart for school at 7:15
- Return from school at 2:30
- Unsupervised play until 5:30
- Dinner at 5:30
- Homework (sometimes! 6 – 6:30)
- Bed by 8 pm.

Although life is constricted and regimented at an RSCC, the children are relatively unsupervised while playing and sleeping. Their opportunities to relate to adults in a meaningful way are limited. Adults are there to supervise and monitor, not to converse with, guide, problem-solve, comfort, or nurture.

- **Private Child Caring Agencies** are run either by Catholic religious orders of nuns, or by laypeople. Many of the laypeople who run private agencies have affiliations with Christian organizations throughout the world. Those organizations provide financial and in-kind contributions to the orphanages. Private Child Caring Agencies vary greatly in their design and structure. Some are as small as a private home, caring for a dozen children. Others are large compounds, caring for up to 250 children. Depending on the location, the children may attend the local public school, a private school, or a school located within the compound. They may have permanent cottage-parents, who function essentially as foster parents, or three shifts of child care workers. Usually children can be kept together with their siblings, and in many of the houses, children of both sexes can live in the same building, but will sleep in different bedrooms.

Private Child Caring Agencies typically have more material resources than do government run agencies. The children are usually better clothed, fed, and have access to better medical care. Private agencies often benefit from the services of foreign volunteers, so the children have had interactions with those outside their immediate circle of caregivers and peers.

The daily schedule of children in a private Child Caring Agency is similar to that of a government agency, but the level of supervision and interaction with adults is quantitatively and qualitatively greater.

- **Institutional Care**

Regardless of the name – Child Caring Agency or orphanage – the children are being cared for in an institution. Institutional living poses many hazards to children's health, safety and well-being. There is extensive and well-documented research detailing the effects of such living on children who have been reared in them since birth. Moving into an institution at an older age, while resulting in less

cognitive and emotional damage, still provides many dangers to children. Your home study agency is mandated to provide you with education about the effects of post-institutionalization on children.

What Happens to Children Who Are Brought into Child Caring Agencies?

Only a small percentage of the children in all the Child Caring Agencies are eventually placed for adoption, because:

- Birthparents may view their current inability to parent to be a temporary one, and place the children in care until they can resume parental responsibilities. This “temporary” situation may go on indefinitely.
- Birthparents may realize that they will never be able to care for their children, but still may be unwilling to terminate their parental rights.
- The social workers at the orphanage are inundated with many responsibilities, and processing a child’s documents to clear him for intercountry adoption is time-consuming and frustrating.
- The Child Caring Agency may have a bias against adoption, and may choose never to process any child’s clearances.
- The Child Caring Agency may not be accredited by the Department of Social Welfare and Development, and therefore is legally unable to process a child’s adoption.
- The child may have serious physical, developmental, or behavioral challenges which make it unlikely that the Child Caring Agency would identify him for adoption, or that an adoptive family would be found for the child.
- The child may be part of a large sibling group which cannot be separated, and it is difficult to find adoptive families for sibling groups of five, six, seven or eight.
- The children who are referred for adoption therefore tend to originate from a limited group of primarily Private Child Caring Agencies. These CCAs are committed to adoption as one solution for children needing families, and have designated staff and financial resources to the process. For the most part, these CCAs are located in the Metro Manila area and in Cebu (south of Manila).

The Adoption Process:

The Philippine government organization responsible for overseeing international adoptions is called the Intercountry Adoption Board (ICAB). It is a division of the larger Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). Three to four hundred children per year are placed for adoption in the U.S. from the Philippines.

- ICAB is responsible for reviewing and approving (or denying) the adoption applications sent to them by their foreign partners. Catholic Charities of Baltimore is one such partner in the U.S. In a typical case, Catholic Charities will forward a family’s dossier to ICAB, and it will take two months for ICAB to review and approve the file. At that time, the family’s name is put on the waiting list of

approved parents. Currently (May 2008) the list contains about 400 family names.

- Usually, a social worker from the Child Caring Agency will visit ICAB to review the dossiers of waiting families. The social worker may have one or more children who have been cleared for adoption. She will review the oldest dossiers first, to determine if she thinks they are appropriate for the child. She must pick two dossiers, and will rank them in order of preference.
- ICAB will review the dossiers and the child information, and will make a decision about which family should receive placement of the child. ICAB will convey that decision to the foreign agency.
- The pre-adoptive family will receive a 3-7 page document called the “Child Study Report,” a summary of the child’s medical record, and a picture of the child. The family has up to 30 days to make a decision about accepting placement.
- If the family accepts the proposed placement, ICAB will release the documents needed to file for the child’s Adoption Visa, which the family will file at their local CIS office. The local office will log in the Adoption Visa Petition Form I-800, and will forward the file to the National Benefits Center in Washington, D.C.
- Depending on the workload of the newly established National Benefits Center, it may take up to five months before the parents will travel to pick up the child.
- At least one parent must travel to the Philippines to pick up the child. The adoption is NOT completed in the Philippines. The Intercountry Adoption Board maintains guardianship of the child until the post placement period is completed in the U.S.
- Most adoptive families stay for 5-7 days in the Philippines. While they are there, they will first pick up their child at his Child Caring Agency, and then visit ICAB for an exit interview. No other formal or legal appointments are necessary.