



## Tips for International Adoption

- The paperwork for an international adoption can seem overwhelming. Take it one step at a time and feel free to call if you have any questions. There are no stupid questions.
- Please request that your international placing agency fax, mail or e-mail to Harmony Adoptions any specific requirements for your home study
- In an international adoption, everything in your dossier should match what is in the home study. Harmony will need copies of everything that is sent in your dossier. Copies are fine. Save originals for your dossier.
- When preparing documents for your dossier, always get two notarized copies of each document. Keep one for your records and one for your dossier. If your records happen to get lost you will not need to start from scratch.
- Many international adoptions require a process of notarization, verification, certification, and authentication of every document in your dossier by the time it reaches the placing country. Any document that originates in the State of Tennessee has two additional steps in the process. The verification of notary must be done on the county level prior to sending them on the Secretary of State of Tennessee. The County Notary generally has an office in the County Building or Courthouse. The notarization must be verified in the county where the notary holds his/her notary. After state certification, documents must go to the US Department of State for another seal. It may be less confusing if you hold all of your documents and make one trip to the courthouse(s) for verification. Please do not hesitate to call and ask and re-ask about the process. When sending documents to the Secretary of State (Tennessee and U.S.) consider using pre-paid Fed Ex or UPS envelopes. Your documents are safer and the clerks tend to hurry them through.
- Though it seems excessive you will end up being fingerprinted twice if you complete an international adoption. The Hague Convention requires that the home study agency receive the results of a fingerprint check prior to approval. Since USCIS has no way of letting agencies know the results of your fingerprint checks and since agencies are required to have written verification of the results of the fingerprint check from the FBI, we require that you be fingerprinted through Cogent Technologies as part of the home study process. You will receive instructions on how to get your fingerprints done for your I-171H/I-797C from USCIS.
- The Adam Walsh act requires that adoption agencies complete a child abuse registry check in every state that you have resided in the past five years. Additionally, if you are adopting from a Hague Convention country, Harmony Adoptions will have to complete a child abuse registry check on you in every state that you have resided in since age 18. This is a complicated process as there is no central abuse registry. Obtaining these clearances can involve fees and may require your signature. Every state has a different process.
- After your home study assessment is completed and approved, we will send you at least three copies. One is your personal copy. One will be for your dossier. One should be sent to USCIS. With the 1 600, Harmony Adoptions can send the home study directly to USCIS. With the 1 800, you or your agency must send a copy a long with the 1 800.
- It can take 6 weeks to three months to get your I-171H/I-797C from USCIS. The average time is around two months.
- Remember that any other adults in the home must provide to Harmony Adoptions medical statements, criminal background checks and an abbreviated autobiography providing a brief life story, career, relationships, the role that they will play in the adopted child's life. They must also be included in the interview process.
- Additionally, due to the Hague Convention and changes with USCIS all financial information must be verified. For instance, we need copies of insurance policies, property tax statements, bank statements, Kelly Blue Book statements, retirement accounts. Basically, Harmony is asked to verify the information that you used when you completed your financial statement.
- Try to do a thorough job of answering the all of questions in the autobiography and questionnaires. It is information that is included in the home study. International home studies have to be very thorough.
- Please feel free to call Pam Frye or Debbie Blair if you have questions at (865) 982-5225.