

Adoption from the Philippines: Frequently Asked Questions

How long have you been placing children from the Philippines?

We first placed our first child from the Philippines in 1980.

Who is your overseas contact?

Welcome House® is approved by the Intercountry Board (ICAB), who is responsible for and oversees all intercountry adoption from the Philippines. Rolly Gocon, the Adoption Coordinator at the Pearl S. Buck International affiliate office in the Philippines, works closely with ICAB to ensure that your adoption process goes smoothly.

Who are the children needing families?

Although there are a few infants and toddlers awaiting families, most of the children available for adoption are over 2 years of age. There are many school-age children that are waiting for their forever families. There are sibling groups, primarily of school-age children, awaiting families. Most sibling groups are made up of 3 or more children, although there are a few sibling groups of 2 children. Both healthy children and children with special needs are available. There are more boys awaiting families than girls.

Please note: As of May 1, 2009 ICAB has instituted a temporary moratorium on applications from families requesting children 0 to 24 months in age who are healthy or who have special needs. They have a large backlog of families requesting children this age. When 50% of their currently approved families have been matched, they will resume accepting applications for children in this age range. In the meantime, the youngest child that a family may request is 25 to 36 months. Stay tuned to the Welcome News newsletter for updates on the status of this moratorium.

Why are the children available for adoption?

There are a lot of reasons that children become available for adoption. The primary reasons are poverty and the stigma of having a child outside of marriage. In addition, some children are removed from their birth families due to abuse and/or neglect.

Children become eligible for adoption in two ways. In the first way, the birth parents sign a document called a “Deed of Voluntary Commitment” (DVC). By signing this document the birth parents are voluntarily relinquishing their parental rights. In the second way, a child is declared legally abandoned by the local court. This is the process used when the birth parents are unknown or cannot be located. In this process, the court in the child’s region processes the child’s paperwork and declares the child legally abandoned. How quickly this happens varies from region to region. It is not unusual for this process to take one to two years. However, new legislation was signed in March, 2009 that, when fully implemented, will likely speed this process.

Are the children healthy?

Generally, the health and development of the children is good. Children are cared for in foster care and small orphanage settings. Due to the effects of institutionalization, some children will have some mild developmental delays. The most important thing to remember is that a “healthy child” does not mean “perfect child.” It is not unusual for children to have some type of mild special need or medical history.

What kind of information will I receive about a child?

The information you receive about the child referred to you will be relatively comprehensive in comparison to information received about children being adopted from other countries. The social workers in the Philippines conduct an investigation for each child in need of a family. Adoptive families often receive background information about the child’s birth family and why they were unable to parent the child. A report of the child’s development and medical history is also prepared. In addition, you will receive at least one photo of the child. Welcome House® can send you a sample referral if you would like to see an example.

Who is eligible to adopt?

- ✓ Parents must be at least 27 years old and at least 16 years older than the child to be adopted.
- ✓ ICAB requires that couples be married for at least three years. Families that have been married for only 1 year but that have lived together for several years prior to marriage in a committed relationship can also be approved.
- ✓ There must be no more than 45 years age difference between the prospective adoptive mother and the child.
- ✓ Single women may adopt children aged 6 and older of either gender who have minor correctible medical conditions or risk factors in their background.
- ✓ ICAB requires that families must be active participants in a faith group, preferably for a period of 5 years or more. Preference is given to Catholic families but families of all denominations are welcome to apply.
- ✓ Applicants must be physically healthy with no history or current diagnosis of diabetes, cancer, organ transplant, stroke, heart attack, use of a pacemaker, multiple sclerosis or other degenerative muscular disorders, auto immune disorders, risk factors that will impede care for the child (i.e. blind, deaf, uses wheelchair, etc.), and Hepatitis B. Applicants also must have a body mass index of 35 or lower.
- ✓ Applicants must be mentally healthy with no history or current diagnosis of psychiatric disorders, mood disorders (i.e. major depressive disorder), anxiety disorders, substance use disorders, and sexual disorders. Applicants who have experienced minor or transitory depression or anxiety may still be eligible to adopt. ICAB will decide this on a case-by-case basis.
- ✓ At least one applicant must be a U.S. citizen.

How long does it take to adopt a child from Philippines?

The time frames can vary greatly from adoption to adoption. On average, it takes families 3 to 5 months to prepare a dossier, including completing the application and home study. Upon receipt of the dossier in the Philippines, it usually takes 1 to 3 months for ICAB to approve the family’s dossier. It is difficult to estimate how long it will take for families to receive a referral. In 2008 ICAB saw an increase in the number of families applying to adopt from the Philippines. It is currently estimated that non-Filipino families will wait 18 to 24 months to be matched with a child. Families where one or both parents are

Filipino are likely to be matched more quickly. We're estimating this time frame at 12 to 18 months. It may take less time to be matched with an older child, a sibling group, a child with special needs, and/or a child about whom there is no background information. After accepting the match, most families are able to travel to the Philippines within 4 to 5 months to bring the child home.

How are children matched with families?

ICAB has created a very child-focused process through which children and families are matched. Once a family's dossier is approved it is added to ICAB's roster of approved families. When it is time to match a child, ICAB will identify 5 families from the roster of approved families that are possible matches for the child. The caregivers at the child's orphanage – the people who know the child best – are given the chance to review the 5 dossiers. They select their first and second choice families for the child based on the strengths of the families and the needs of the child. (These two families are never adopting through the same agency in the U.S.) The orphanage staff then has to indicate to ICAB why they selected these two families. If ICAB agrees with the selection, the child will be referred to the first choice family. If that family declines the referral, the child will be referred to the second family.

What paperwork is required for the application?

The application is the beginning of the adoption process. Welcome House® will give you all the documents and/or step-by-step directions on how to obtain the necessary documents. The documents include:

- ✓ Face Sheet of Application
- ✓ Criminal history clearances for all adults in the household
- ✓ Child abuse history clearances for all adults in the household
- ✓ Medical exams for all household members
- ✓ Photographs
- ✓ Child Conditions Form
- ✓ Financial form, as well as a copy of your most recent 1040 form
- ✓ Autobiographies
- ✓ Birth certificate(s)
- ✓ Marriage certificate, if applicable
- ✓ Divorce decree(s), if applicable
- ✓ Employment letter(s)
- ✓ Directions to your home
- ✓ 4 references from people familiar with your family

Other forms that are specific to Welcome House® include:

- ✓ Home study questionnaire
- ✓ Welcome House® Philosophy and Policy on Discipline
- ✓ Risks in Inter-country Adoption
- ✓ Civil Rights Compliance
- ✓ Service Plan and Agreement
- ✓ Fee Policy
- ✓ Photo release (optional)

What is a dossier?

The dossier is a package of documents that is compiled and submitted to the Intercountry Adoption Board (ICAB). It is the way that they get to know your family. ICAB will review your dossier and, once it is approved, will use the information contained within it to match you with your child. It is not uncommon for ICAB to ask questions about your family during the approval process.

How do I put a dossier together?

Welcome House® will give you step-by-step instructions on completing your dossier. Basically, you just need to submit the required documents to Welcome House®. Documents do not need to be authenticated.

What documents are required in a dossier?

Many of the documents that are required for the application will be used in the dossier. There also will be some new information that you will need to provide, including a psychological evaluation. The documents required for the dossier are:

- ✓ Psychological evaluation(s)
- ✓ Character reference from religious leader who has known you for at least 5 years
- ✓ Character reference from employer(s)
- ✓ Character reference from community member
- ✓ Letter of Acceptance from Guardian
- ✓ Photographs
- ✓ Medical form(s)
- ✓ Birth certificate(s)
- ✓ Adoption Decree for any previously adopted child
- ✓ Marriage certificate, if applicable
- ✓ Divorce decree(s), if applicable
- ✓ 1040 Tax form with notarized affidavit
- ✓ Criminal history clearances
- ✓ Your home study
- ✓ Notarized consent to the adoption from each biological or adopted child who is 10 years or older
- ✓ Accurate Data for Applicants for Adoption from The Philippines Form
- ✓ Application Form for Intercountry Adoption
- ✓ Type of Child Acceptable to Family Form
- ✓ Self-Report Questionnaire Form

Am I required to travel to the Philippines?

Philippines law requires that at least one parent must travel, although both parents are encouraged to travel.

Can I bring someone with me when I travel?

You are welcome to bring anyone with you. Welcome House® strongly encourages single parents or parents traveling alone to bring a support person with them. In the past, families have brought children, friends, and family. It is important that you choose companions that are flexible travelers and that any young children can endure the long flights, etc.

What can I expect for travel?

The length of stay in Philippines is generally 7 days. You will fly into Manila and then travel to your child's orphanage. Depending on the age of your child and the requirements of the orphanage, you may receive your child on the first day or you may need to stay in your child's home town for 1 to 3 days, visiting the orphanage each day, in order to ease your child's transition to your family. You will then return to Manila and visit the ICAB offices to receive your final permission to depart with your child. Welcome House® families are accompanied by Welcome House® in-country staff. We will arrange opportunities for you to go sightseeing and shopping in each city you visit.

What happens if my child or I need medical attention while in the Philippines?

Rolly, our Adoption Coordinator in Manila, will arrange for you or your child to be seen by a physician. Welcome House® recommends that families purchase travel insurance.

When is the adoption final?

You will finalize the adoption in local U.S. courts after completing post placement supervision (six months) and upon receipt of the consent for adoption from ICAB.

Can I get health insurance for my child before the adoption is finalized?

Yes. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act stipulates that a child placed with a family for adoption has the same eligibility status for health insurance through the adopting parents' health insurance provider. Please consult with your insurer to inquire about pre-existing conditions clauses.

Can the child be removed from my care after I come home to the U.S.?

Yes, but this is highly unlikely. The only circumstance that would warrant removal is a recommendation from Welcome House® that the adopting parents do not have the capacity to care for the child. Whenever possible, we work extensively with families to build their parenting capacity to create a better home for the child and to avoid removing him/her. By the time an American family receives placement of a Filipino child, there is no risk of disruption due to a change of circumstances for the birth family.

Adoption of Waiting Children from the Philippines: Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Waiting Child Program?

ICAB identifies children with special needs and sends their files to agencies that have been approved to place waiting children. They have found that this is a successful way to find families for children that may otherwise be difficult to match with families. These children may have medical, physical, developmental, cognitive, or emotional special needs that are typically moderate to severe.

How do I adopt a waiting child?

There are two ways to adopt a waiting child. First, several times each year ICAB will send Welcome House® information about waiting children. You may review the information about these waiting children and may identify a child that you would like to adopt. Once you have identified a child and Welcome House® has approved you for the placement of that child, you will have a home study completed if you do not have one. If you do have a completed home study, Welcome House® will notify ICAB that you are accepting this referral

Second, you may also submit your dossier to ICAB requesting a waiting child with a particular special need. You will wait for ICAB to match you with a child matching your request. The length of this process depends on the number and severity of special needs that you are open to.

How is the waiting child adoption process different than the regular adoption process?

When your dossier is submitted to ICAB it will include a request to adopt the specific waiting child that you have identified. ICAB will review and make a determination on both your dossier and your match with the child at the same time. Because they give preference to waiting children, the time between dossier submission and ICAB's decision is typically one month or less. Once you are approved to adopt the child, the time between approval and travel remains the same, 4 to 5 months.

What information can I receive about a waiting child?

ICAB provides Welcome House® with the child's background report, the results of a medical report, the results of any other relevant evaluations (i.e. evaluations by a speech therapist, developmental counselors, play therapist, etc.). If, after reviewing the child's information, you have additional questions about the child it is typically possible to get further information from ICAB.

What more should I know about the Waiting Child program?

The waiting child program is a wonderful opportunity to provide a stable, loving family and access to first-rate medical and therapeutic resources to a child who might not otherwise have it. Families adopting waiting children should be prepared to spend extra time and resources assisting their child in overcoming his or her medical needs. Some waiting children have come home and have been found to have milder needs than previously reported. In addition, some waiting children have come home and have been found to have additional or more special needs than previously known. Families need to be prepared for this possibility.

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