

ADOPTION ACROSS BORDERS: Reaching Out to Military Families

Military families have long been overlooked when it comes to adoption. The Adoption Exchange, in partnership with Voice for International Development (VIDA) and the National Military Family Association, have collaborated to put together a training on how best to work with and support military families through the adoption process. One of these training sessions was sponsored by the Education Center in Shawnee, Oklahoma. Linda Foster, Program Manager for the State of Oklahoma, learned of this training opportunity at The Adoption Exchange's Annual Membership Meeting in the spring of 2003. As she recalls, her 'heart leapt' after hearing a brief presentation and she got very excited about the possibility of connecting with military families on several of the bases in Oklahoma as well as military families living abroad.

Prior to the training, the prevailing attitude appeared to be 'never place a child with a military family as they will only get deployed.' Workers left the training with a better appreciation for military families as prospective placement resources and a fuller understanding that, typically, military families have better back-up plans than civilian families in preparation for sudden location changes and that there is a broad, stable network of support for military families to tap into no matter where in the world they live. In addition, Oklahoma staff have been able to create better avenues of communication with military chaplains at the Family Support Centers on several of the bases who are helping to inform military families of the adoption option.

In a further attempt to integrate this information into practice, Oklahoma established a Military Sub-Committee focused on recruiting and supporting military families. In April 2006, this committee hosted its first Military Resource Family Appreciation Day at the Oklahoma City Zoo. Twenty-five military families from throughout the state attended and were treated to free admission, lunch and a family portrait. Oklahoma's child welfare director and a congressional representative attended and lent their support as well. Plans are currently underway for a second event in April of 2007.

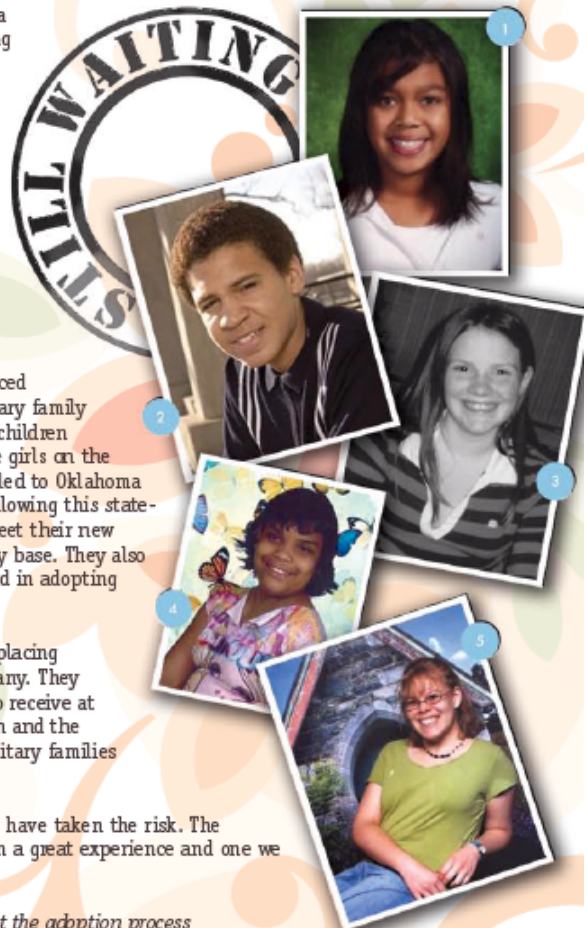
So - you might ask - have any children in foster care in the State of Oklahoma who were in need of an adoptive family been able to find one as a result of this effort? And the answer, happily enough, is 'yes!'

In early October of 2005, a sibling group of two girls, ages 9 and 12 who had been living in foster care for several years and who were currently placed in a therapeutic foster care home, found their 'forever family' with a military family stationed in Germany. This family was already parenting three biological children and a sibling group whom they had adopted state-side when they saw the girls on the AdoptUsKids website. After being approved for adoption, the family traveled to Oklahoma and spent two weeks getting to know the girls and their foster family. Following this state-side meeting, two Oklahoma staff accompanied the girls to Germany to meet their new family and, while there, hosted an adoption support group on the military base. They also spent time visiting with several more military families who were interested in adopting and made some valuable contacts.

Since that time, the State of Oklahoma has placed or is in the process of placing twelve children with four families who are stationed on the base in Germany. They have experienced only one disruption. Linda shared that she continues to receive at least one inquiry a week from U.S. families living in Germany, Italy, Japan and the Netherlands and she is looking forward to continuing to find adoptive military families (both abroad and state-side) for Oklahoma's waiting children.

Linda sums it up best when she says, "Without the training we would not have taken the risk. The training opened our eyes to the services available in the military. It's been a great experience and one we look forward to continuing!"

All members of the military who would be interested in learning more about the adoption process while serving in the military can call The Adoption Exchange at 1-800-451-5246 or visit www.adoptex.org.



1 Ruby in Colorado

2 Andrew in Missouri

3 Cassandra in Utah

4 Kachalla in Oklahoma

5 Kristina in Wyoming