

specialising in
inter-country adoption,
providing a timely, high
quality service for
prospective parents

New Agency Launched



To Help Parents Wanting To Adopt Overseas Children

By Marian Hudson

New Zealand prospective parents wanting to adopt children from overseas now have the option of a new charitable trust to prepare, assess and approve them to adopt from four overseas countries.

Adoption First Steps (AFS), a not for profit organisation based in Auckland, was accredited as the country's first non-government adoption, education and assessment agency by the Ministry of Social Development in November 2013.

The accreditation is the culmination of three years hard work by the AFS Board, who are all adoptive parents themselves and who bring together real-life experience and expertise fundamental to the success of inter-country adoption.

AFS Trust Chairperson, Sarah Morton, the mother of an eight year old adopted boy, said AFS began as the seed of an idea during a back deck gathering.

"The idea was that it would be great to have a service that specialised only in inter-country adoption as the challenges it creates can be quite different to adopting or fostering in New Zealand," Sarah said.

"We are all passionate about our kids, and between us we had a range of great skills from social work and education to health management and organisational development that could be useful in developing a specialised education and assessment agency," Sarah said. "In addition we have had advice and input from experts who have given their time free of charge to assist the Board's goals."

Unlike children adopted from within New Zealand, nearly all children adopted from overseas have been institutionalised for some time, so parents need to have specialised skills to provide for the children's needs.

"AFS aims to guide parents to understand how they can assist these children and grow a successful family," Sarah said.

Research and anecdotal evidence tells us that the better prepared parents and families are, the more successful the adoption will be for the child and their family.

Working closely with the Ministry of Social Development, AFS is now accredited to undertake the first steps required prior to parents being approved to adopt children from overseas.

New Zealand has programs in place to adopt children from seven countries and AFS is currently certified to work with parents wanting to adopt children from Chile, Lithuania, India and Thailand.

Inter-country adoption can be exciting but also challenging so it is really important that parents are prepared for the realities of adopting and raising a child from overseas. Although the process can, at times, feel overwhelming, the joy and enrichment these children bring to their families lives cannot be underestimated. The vast majority of children adopted from overseas lead positive and happy lives. Their parents feel honoured to have had the opportunity to support, love and share their child's life journey.

The AFS approach begins with providing prospective parents with the ability to explore their options through their website at www.adoptionfirststeps.org.nz.

Through the AFS website prospective parents can also undertake, free of charge or obligation, an introductory course that provides facts about inter-country adoption and helps parents to make informed decisions.

The first step is check your eligibility. The country of adoption may require parents to be, for example, within a certain age range.

Prospective parents can contact AFS and must check with the adoption agencies, Child, Youth and Family (CYF), if eligible, parents can register with AFS then begin step two, the online education modules, and take part in the AFS one Inter-Country Adoption New Zealand (ICANZ) or Compassion for Orphans (CFO) to confirm eligibility.

day workshop. During this time parents gain knowledge about inter-country adoption and how to prepare for a child. The one day workshop is an opportunity to also meet AFS staff and other adopting parents. In parallel to the education program, documents such as police and medical checks are collected.

Following this, in step three an AFS Social Worker begins to assess the parents for suitability, guiding them to understand the skills and characteristics of their family and the needs of the future child.

This assessment is then adapted into a Home Study Report. The overseas adoption agency or government department use the Home Study Report to match the parents with a suitable child.

This is where the role of AFS concludes and approved prospective parents can then choose one of three placement (adoption) agencies to begin the adoption.

The adoption process finishes with the return of the child to New Zealand with their adoptive parents and the legal processing.

Sarah said the launching of AFS means adoptive parents have a choice of agency to complete the first stage of intercountry adoption.

AFS is focussed on specialising in inter-country adoption, providing a timely, high quality service for prospective parents.

"Having a family, including adopting our son, has been one of the best parts of my life," Sarah said. "Beyond my previously rational comprehension, it has highlighted for me the core need in all people for belonging, love and acceptance."

AFS operates nationally

For further information - www.adoptionfirststeps.org.nz
email - info@adoptionfirststeps.org.nz



Editors Note:

ICANZ is a placement agency. This means ICANZ represents the prospective adoptive parents to the overseas authority, facilitates the application, matching and adoption process and visits you after you arrive home with your child to provide post placement monitoring.

ICANZ does not provide education/assessment/approval services - that is done by AFS or CYF