

AHH Update / February 21, 2006

Dear Families,

Hello from A Helping Hand. I hope that you all are doing well, and that you enjoyed a beautiful Valentine's Day. Whether you are still putting together your paperwork or waiting patiently for your referral, I am sure that you are ready for the latest update on referrals. I am sorry to say that for the month of February, there are no referrals scheduled to arrive at our office. I know this may be disappointing news, but it is what we expected having tracked the referral patterns of the CCAA for the past few months. Currently the CCAA is issuing referrals approximately once a month and the referrals cover Dossiers with LIDs of approximately two to three weeks. Referrals issued in February covered Dossiers logged into the China Center of Adoption Affairs through May 13, 2005. It just so happened that AHH did not have any Dossiers logged in during that time period, and thus, there were no referrals to be issued for our agency, specifically. Although we do not know the exact cut-off dates for the next batch of referrals, it looks like next month's referrals could cover Dossiers logged in through May 26, 2005 or possibly through the end of May. A Helping Hand has a number of Dossiers logged in during this time period, so we anticipate receiving referrals for a number of our waiting families. Of course, working with the CCAA is never an exact science, but the CCAA has consistently issued referrals toward the beginning of the month for several months. March referrals could arrive in our office during the first or second week of March, if the CCAA's current referral pattern holds true.

Guatemala: Referrals for our Guatemala program do not arrive in batches as they do for China, they usually come in one at a time. In total, we have 24 families who have received referrals over the past few months and we have 3 families scheduled to leave for their adoption trip in February.

I would also like to announce that we have hired a new Family Advocate for the Guatemala program. Maria Kovaleski-Rivera is the newest member of the AHH team, and we are delighted to have her on board. Families currently adopting from Guatemala will be working with both Andrea Phillips and Maria in the coming months. Maria is bilingual with her native language being Spanish. She has done extensive international work in South America, and has been involved in on-going missions outreach work in Mexico for several years now. We would like to welcome Maria to our agency to warmly introduce her to our adoptive families!

Document Updates: As I mentioned in last month's update, it is important for all families to monitor the expiration of their paperwork. For those of you who have sent your dossier to China, your Family Advocate has already contacted you with the expiration dates for your Home Study, I-171, and fingerprints. I want to continue to encourage you to keep track of these dates, as well.

It was brought to our attention after issuing last month's update that USCIS will not allow families to schedule an appointment to have their fingerprints renewed until 30 days prior to the date their prints are set to expire. Please keep this in mind as you schedule your appointments. We also urge you not to initiate a home study update too long before it expires. It is most prudent to begin the renewal process for these documents about a month before they are scheduled to expire. This ensures that your documents are as fresh as possible at the time your travel is scheduled, and will also ensure that your appointment is not rejected by the USCIS office. If you have any questions about document expiration issues, please contact your Family Advocate.

Reason for the China Referral Slowdown: There are many rumors hypothesizing on the reason why the China Center of Adoption Affairs has initiated a slow down of referrals. Although the CCAA is infamous for being tightlipped about their operations, they have officially stated that the reason the referral wait has increased is because the Dossier processing time is intrinsically linked to the availability of children. The CCAA is currently stating that there are more families adopting than there are children available. In earlier years, when there were far fewer people adopting from China, the wait time was consistently 6-7 months long. As the number of families adopting from China increased, the wait time also began extending. A few years ago, the wait had increased to almost 18 months! Recently, our families have enjoyed a wait time of 6-7 months from LID to referral. As you can see over the course of the years, the processing time for Dossiers has continually fluctuated. This is exactly what we are experiencing right now. The processing time is completely out of the hands of adoption agencies, and if the CCAA chooses to slow down the process, then we must adjust our program to accommodate that slow down. In November, the CCAA posted a brief explanation on their website regarding the extended wait time, and this statement still communicates the CCAA's frame of mind regarding referral times. We suggest that you check out the CCAA's website to review the notice first hand:

CCAA Statement on Extended Wait Times:

www.china-ccaa.org/site/lyb/content_en.jsp?table=app_lybhf_content&id=3

You might also want to check out the rest of the CCAA's website. It provides a wealth of information about this organization, how they work, and what their responsibilities are. There is also some great information on humanitarian projects in which they are currently involved. As you wait for the CCAA to complete the processing of your referral, we encourage you to take some time to learn more about the scope of their operations, their accomplishments, and their goals.

AHH's Touch Point Newsletter - February 2006

I also wanted to give you the link to our new monthly newsletter. We recently sent this newsletter out to our families, but I am including the link with this update, as well. If you didn't receive it, please sign up! If you click on the link above, you will see a box on the left side where you can sign-up for the newsletter. For those of you who are struggling with the extended wait, I encourage you to review the photos of the children who

returned with our January travel groups. This is solid evidence that there is truly a beautiful child for you at the other end of this process! I hope you will be encouraged and heartened to catch a glimpse of the joy that awaits you. You can check out these photos in the Welcome Home section of the newsletter.

AHH Special Needs Program: Many of you may know that the CCAA has granted AHH the honor to be a part of the Waiting Child Special Needs Program. This program allows AHH to receive referrals for 25-30 special need's children and empowers our agency with the authority to grant those referrals to qualified parents who demonstrate the desire and capability to parent a special need's child. In November 2005, we were issued paperwork for 31 special needs children. We are proud to say that 24 of these children have been matched with a loving family. We celebrate with these families as they prepare their hearts, homes and lives for these special children. Friday Feb. 17, we returned files to the CCAA for 4 children, and the CCAA will now begin assembling another group of special need's referrals for us. AHH receives a special needs listing 3-4 times a year, and we anticipate our next list to be issued sometime in March or April.

When the next list is released, I would like to encourage our in-process families to review the photos and profiles of the children. With the referral wait extending, we have found that many families are open to considering a child with mild, medically-correctible special needs so that they can avoid the lengthened wait time. If any families are interested in finding out more information on this program, please contact your Family Advocate so that they can discuss the program with you or schedule a time to speak with Grace Shelton, our Special Needs Coordinator.

I am excited to announce that our protocols for the Waiting Child Program will soon be changing. We have been working diligently for the past few months to establish a better way to handle the emotional and procedural frenzy that accompany the arrival of our special need's list. Our existing program provides a child's referral to the first family who submits all the required paperwork for the child. In keeping to our commitment to do what is in the best interest of the child, our new program has been developed so that the child can be referred to the family who is most qualified to care for that child, not necessarily the first family to submit the relevant paperwork. This means that we will now collect paperwork for families interested in a child, and then a referral committee will meet to review the profiles, treatment outlines and support system of all the families interested in that particular child. The final matching of a family to a child will be made by a referral committee, composed of various AHH staff, medical and mental health professionals and other qualified parties. Our goal in these changes is to remove the frenzy of faxes, emails and phone calls from the referral process so that the best decision can be made for the child and the family. We are excited about the transformation this program is undergoing, and we will provide a more detailed outline of the new protocols in the next couple of weeks.

AHH Travel Update: The Travel Services Department at A Helping Hand, in conjunction with the AHH China office, is increasing our services for all traveling families. In the past, families whose travel group to their child's provinces had fewer than 4 families did not receive the services of an AHH staff person while in the province. Historically, we have worked with a local tour guide, who was knowledgeable in travel and the local adoption protocols. We are excited to announce this will be changing. With this new change, all families, including AHH Special Need's families traveling individually to their child's province, will have both a local tour guide and an AHH-China staff member during each portion of the adoption trip. AHH is happy to provide this additional service and support to all of our families. Essentially this means that for each travel group, there will be a local expert as well as an adoption expert with families throughout the entirety of the trip. We hope that this increased level of service and commitment will enhance the quality of our families' adoption travel experiences.

AHH Fees: I would also like to let you know that A Helping Hand will be raising our adoption fees effective April 1, 2006. The fees will raise \$800. September 2004 was last time we raised our fees, and our agency has encountered considerable growth since that time. We have hired new staff, both domestically and overseas, increased the level of our service and have incorporated new protocols into our existing program. Although this fee increase will not affect any families currently in process, it will apply to all families who contract with us from April 1, 2006 forward. We are announcing the news of this fee increase in advance, so that families who are considering their second adoption can have the opportunity to initiate the process now, before the fee change comes into effect. If this applies to you, please contact your Family Advocate, and they will be happy to answer any questions you may have. Additionally, the application fee for second time adoptive families will be waived.

In closing, I would like to say that A Helping Hand is thankful that the People's Republic of China has allowed us the opportunity to experience the blessing of raising these beautiful children. It is my prayer that you do not become discouraged during the extended waiting process. We will do our very best to keep you posted on updates as they become available. As you know AHH does not resort to listening to rumors and false information, which at times may seem to cause a slow response from our office. Sometimes accurate information takes longer to obtain than "off-the-cuff" answers might. Rest assured that our goal is to make sure you receive accurate information that is relevant and forthcoming.

Thank your for your attention, patience and understanding. Please continue to pray for our agency, our staff, both here and overseas, and for your daughter or son who is waiting for you to bring them home.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Lane Weippert
International Adoptions Manager