

International-adoption fee waiver is official

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The expected waiver of international-adoption fees by the province has come through.

The fee added \$925 to the cost of international adoptions (\$460 for adoptions which involved a child related to the adoptive family). This represented a processing fee, to cover such costs to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services as approval of home studies, evaluating matches between the children and their prospective parents, and licensing adoption agencies.

These processes were implemented in the wake of the Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000 to ensure that the children in these situations are safe and the adoptive families are not taken advantage of.

Commenting last week, Cobourg adoption practitioner Sandra Webb said such a waiver was timely, considering the recent tsunami which devastated so much of south Asia.

It's good news, she added, as the international-adoption costs already range from \$10,000 to \$30,000.

Ms. Webb also pointed out that adoptive families are often the last ones to complain about costs, because they fear jeopardizing their adoptions.

"Families adopting children

from other countries are already paying substantial costs," acknowledged Marie Bountrogianni, Minister of Children and Youth Services. "They have asked us to make it easier, and we have responded. We're making it a little bit easier for Ontarians to bring a child into their families and give them a place to call home."

The press release outlined steps to take in adopting a child from another country.

All applicants, both relative and non-relative, must:

- Apply to a ministry-licensed adoption agency.
- Have a home study completed by an approved adoption practitioner.
- Apply to Citizenship and Immigration Canada to sponsor a child to be adopted.
- Apply to the Canadian embassy abroad for an immigrant visa for the child to enter Canada.

The adoption agency must:

- Submit the application to the adoption authority in the child's country of origin.
- Obtain a child proposal from the foreign adoption authority.

The ministry must:

- Approve the family's suitability and eligibility to adopt.
- Approve the child proposal, where the child's country of origin requires it.

The adoption will be completed in the child's country of origin. On

average, the process takes 12 to 18 months.

Ms. Webb referred to comments Premier Dalton McGuinty made, urging that everything be done to expedite the process. She doubts, however, that short cuts will be made and can see no way to make it quicker than six months to a year.

And that countdown begins once tsunami-ravaged countries even *begin* to allow adoptions, she added.

As one licensed to work with adoptions in many of these countries, she expects they will first want to ensure that as many children as possible are reunited with their own families or at least placed with extended-family members.

Other delays might result from the simple fact that the governments in these countries are now preoccupied with disaster relief.

Ms. Webb has also heard suggestions that funding might be made available to encourage international adoptions, but no word on the questions such a program would raise — such as how to qualify for such financial assistance and whether the supplement would apply to all international adoptions or only those from countries affected by this particular disaster.

In 2003, the ministry processed 695 international adoptions.