

Legislation to cut adoption time

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COBOURG — With fewer babies up for adoption and infertility becoming a more widespread problem, Cobourg adoption consultant Sandra Webb thinks it timely that November is Adoption Awareness Month.

Adoption is not widely discussed because it is an emotional issue for everyone involved — especially if infertility is the reason for adoption, she said.

The expense, emotional toll and unreliability of in vitro fertilization makes adoption an attractive option.

There are three avenues, said Mrs. Webb: adopting through the Children's Aid Society (free), adopting privately in Canada (at a cost of \$6,000 to \$12,000) and adopting privately overseas (costing \$30,000 to \$40,000).

"I have probably done about 18 home studies for international adoptions in the last year and a half," said Mrs. Webb.

In Ontario in 1997, there were 667 international adoptions, 255 private domestic adoptions and 619 adoptions done through Children's Aid.

There is a chronic shortage of available babies in Canada, but the provincial Ministry of Community and Social Services is trying to make it easier to find them with a centralized computer database in a program called Canada's Waiting Children.

"The ministry is concerned that lots of very good families are going overseas to adopt, and we want to adopt the

children who are here," she explained.

New legislation which promises to shorten the time children spend in foster care may make them available for adoption at an earlier age. Meanwhile, a lot of families who want babies or do not want to put in the waiting time required for a domestic adoption turn to international adoption.

There is also good news on that front too.

New legislation is being introduced to licence the facilitators that handle these adoptions and establish some guidelines.

"China is very popular, because people can adopt infants," Mrs. Webb said. "It seems the children are healthy and have done quite well, because they are adopted as babies.

"Russia is the next most popular country. They are expecting things to be pretty rough in Russia and the Ukraine this winter because of the economy."

Mrs. Webb counsels those considering international adoption that they must respect the unknowns inherent in such an action.

"They have to accept the risks of a child where little is known about their birth family," she listed.

"They may have poor medical and nutritional care, and they have lived in an orphanage. You have to be very committed, because you have a lot of paper work to do.

"The big difference between domestic and international adoptions is, you have much more information on the child's background (in a domestic adoption)," she pointed out.

"You have a process of



PHOTO BY CECILIA NASMITH

ADOPTION AWARENESS: Sandra Webb says the provincial Ministry of Community and Social Services is trying to make adoption easier with a centralized computer database.

getting to know the child before it is placed. After the placement, you have a six-month supervision period to help with the settling in and attachment and anything that might come up. You might have a subsidy if the child is older in case there are medical or emotional problems.

"Internationally, in most cases, the adoption is completed in the country and, when you come back, you are on your own."

She is not trying to paint the international-adoption

picture black, she said — just trying to list all the pros and cons for interested families.

"They have to go into it with open eyes, so they know what it's all about," she said. "You can't sugar-coat it, but you can enjoy it when a family adopts and it's a really joyful thing."

Everyone of a certain age remembers the bad old days when out-of-wedlock pregnancies were shameful and such a mother had no choice but to relinquish her baby. Now, said Mrs. Webb,

it takes a pretty strong mother to make that difficult decision.

"The good thing is, birth parents feel they have more choice — and that's a good thing. I think it caused a lot of pain and heartache for birth parents in the past who felt they didn't have any choice, and a lot of adoptees suffered a lot of pain because of that.

"Open adoption has become a much more common situation."

This involves a birth mother being given profiles

of several prospective parents and making her own choice.

"That's really a positive thing, because they have some choice and some participation and more idea of where the child is going.

"After that, it's open. Some adoptive parents are in the delivery room. Some choose just to meet with the mother at the adoption and might exchange pictures and letters. It can be as open as a continuing relationship where the birth parents continue to visit."

Open adoption is a frank acknowledgment of the rights of a birth parent, she summed up.

"Adoptive parents are frightened by that, because birth parents might change their minds," she said. "It's horrible, but it happens. But it's their right.

"What we have seen is, for most children, it's a positive thing because they don't feel they have been abandoned and are unloved."

Though open adoption is certainly not for everyone, said Mrs. Webb, she does have one prediction that involves more openness.

"By the time children of today have grown up, files are probably going to be open. Even now, more adopted children who want to find their parents can do that through the Internet and organizations that are available."

Mrs. Webb likens her role to that of a parent at a wedding. She has done her best to advise the parties and now she has to stand back, with both joy and trepidation, as they embark on an adventure that is risky but may yet bring great fulfillment.