Adopting a Child from Russia

March 2012

Wide Horizons for Children (WHFC) is pleased to offer Russia as a program option for adoptive families. We are accredited by the Russian Ministry of Science and Education to provide adoption services to families. As an accredited agency, WHFC has an office in Moscow and a staff of approximately 15 dedicated and experienced employees living in Russia. We currently work in 8 regions – Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Bryansk, Rostov-on-Don, Tyumen, Voronezh, and Vladivostok – and are always looking for opportunities to expand our adoption programs. As such, our families may be asked to travel to new regions as part of their adoption process.

We have placed more than 1,000 children from Russia with loving families here in the US since 1992. This year we hope to have approximately 20 more children arrive home.

We are confident that you will be very satisfied working with our knowledgeable and dedicated Russia program team. Nataliya Bondarenko, administrative assistant, assists with paperwork and translation and is able to share a wealth of cultural information with families, as she was born in Ukraine. Kate Engle, case manager, is a master’s level social worker who has spent time living and studying in Russia. Jennifer Doane, clinical manager, has over seven years’ experience assisting families who have adopted from Russia, particularly during the home study and post placement phases of their adoption. In addition, the team can put you in touch with families who have adopted from Russia so you can learn about their experiences firsthand. Your family will be assigned a specific case manager after the Russia Program team receives your home study.

About Russia

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia has been an independent republic. Spanning both the European and Asian continents, Russia is the largest country in the world. Its more than 145 million residents reflect a broad range of cultural groups, including those of Russian, Tartar, Ukrainian, Chuvash, Bashkir, Belo Russian, Kazak, Uzbek, and Moldovan heritage. Each group has a long, diverse history and colorful traditions, including their own folk music, language and religion.
Children Who Need Families

Hundreds of thousands of children are currently living in Russian orphanages, but only a small percentage of them are legally free for international adoption. In fact, the number of children available for international adoption has been influenced by an increase in the number of Russian citizens choosing to foster and/or adopt children. That is, there has been a high-profile public relations campaign within Russia to promote adoption. In addition, there are financial incentives to help defray the cost of raising an adopted child – which is also an inducement not to abandon or relinquish children. Russian citizens have traditionally adopted the youngest, healthiest children, particularly girls.

Every child in the world needs and deserves the love of a family. When children cannot live with their birth family or another loving family in the country where they were born, international adoption may be the best option for them to receive the special attention and love they deserve.

There are many different reasons that children may be available for international adoption. Children from Russia are referred for adoption for one or more of the following reasons:

- Birth parents may relinquish a child because of poverty, which can make it a struggle to meet the child's basic needs or the needs of an additional child. Unable to feed, clothe or provide shelter for their child, birth parents may choose adoption so that the child will have the chance for a better life. In addition, birth parents are sometimes unable to care for their children due to illness, social stigma or other reasons and relinquish care to local authorities.

- Children may be available for adoption because the government terminated the birth parents’ rights involuntarily. As in the US, this decision is usually made by child welfare authorities to protect the child from physical or sexual abuse, neglect or inconsistent and irregular care. Even in these difficult circumstances, birth parents may have had periods of providing good care and may have some loving feelings towards their children, and the children are likely to feel sadness about the loss of their birth family.

- Some children are abandoned by birth parents or relatives and found by local authorities. Although no information is known about the circumstances in these cases, it may be that the birth parents made the only plan they could for their child. Children are often abandoned out of a family's desperation with not being able to provide for the child or because parents do not know how to surrender their child for adoption.

In all circumstances, children have experienced a loss in being separated from their birth parents and placed into someone else’s care. You should be prepared to accept a referral regardless of how the child came into care at a Russian orphanage.

Description of Children Available

Age: Children of all ages are in need of homes. We place children as young as 8-18 months at the time of referral, as well as toddlers, pre-school and school-aged children. There is great need for families for children over 18 months of age.

Gender: Most of the children in need of adoption in Russia are boys. You may request a boy regardless of the make-up of your family. Families requesting a child 0-4 years old may state their preference for a girl in accordance with WHFC’s gender policy. However, all families with the “preference” for a girl must be open to adopting a boy. Families open to a child over the age of 4 years may request either a boy or girl.

Siblings: Biologically related sibling groups are available. We will not place two biologically unrelated children at the same time. Families requesting siblings should be open to children 0-4 years, as a minimum age range. Siblings can be any combination of ages within that bracket.
Appearance: Russia is a diversely populated country with many different ethnic groups living within its borders. Children available for adoption will come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and will vary in appearances. Facial features and skin tones will range from fair skinned with light hair and eyes to olive complexion with dark hair and eyes. The majority of the children are Caucasian, but a significant number of children may have Eurasian and Asian features. Please remember that, according to WHFC policy, you must be open to a child of any appearance; therefore, you may not request to be matched with a Caucasian child. We encourage you to discuss the range of appearances and ethnic backgrounds with your social worker.

Living Conditions and Care of Children

Before entering government care: Before children come into government care, they have often been living with birth parents, whether for one day or several years. Children placed for adoption as infants are not likely to have conscious memories of this period in their lives but may still be affected significantly by the experience. Children who live with birth parents for an extended period of time and are adopted at an older age are more likely to have been exposed to trauma. This may include witnessing the death of a birth parent or other relative. Some children may have been abused and neglected within their birth family or community. Children living with birth families frequently have little or no medical care due to poverty and a lack of infrastructure within the country. They may have experienced a lack of food and been hungry for significant periods of time. Some children may have lived with many different family members and had little consistency with their primary caregiver or surroundings. Other children may have lived on the streets unsupervised for some period of time.

Under the care of child welfare providers: Once children in Russia enter the child welfare system they live in an institutional setting. At times children may reside in a Social Welfare unit of a hospital while waiting for placement at an orphanage or “Baby Home”. Baby Homes serve children ages 0-4 years. At age 4, children are transferred from the Baby Home to an Orphanage. The children are divided by age into small-group settings with well-decorated living rooms and bedrooms. Resources and caregiver-to-child ratios vary among Baby Homes and orphanages. Most orphanages provide for basic medical needs and nutrition in a highly structured environment. Many orphanages are able to provide toys, play activities and other opportunities for emotional and developmental stimulation. However, no matter how elaborate the resources, orphanages never provide the level of individualized attention that children need and deserve. Despite this, most caregivers do their best with the resources they are given, and some care deeply for the children. Some children will bond to a particular caregiver, while others may not have a special relationship. In some situations, the close proximity of the children and a lack of consistent oversight may lead to a child experiencing physical or sexual abuse by a caregiver or another child. Regardless of the type of care a child receives, s/he will have experienced one or more transitions that may affect their ability to adjust and attach to their adoptive family. Children may also be uncertain whether their placement in an adoptive family is permanent. Families should speak with their social worker or case manager about ways to ease the child’s transition into the family.

WHFC is committed to improving living conditions for orphaned children. Part of your program fee is used to support our humanitarian aid efforts in Russia and other countries. This may include funding for medical care, developmental programs, training for caregivers or other support as needed.

Information You Can Expect At Referral

According to Russian law, information on children available for international adoption must be given to the family directly by Russian government officials. Therefore, families travel to Russia to receive the official referral information and meet their child. However, each region seems to interpret this law in their own way. We are currently receiving some information about the child before travel in 6 out of 8 of our regions. The amount of information varies by region. Even in regions where we currently receive some information, that could change suddenly if there is a new government official who interprets the law more conservatively. Therefore, you should expect to travel to Russia without knowing anything about your child/ren. Your case manager will simply contact you when you have been given a referral and
schedule a time to discuss both emotional and logistical preparation to meet your child. It may be at that time or up to several weeks later that you will receive your exact travel itinerary from the case manager.

In those instances when we receive a brief medical summary and/or picture of a child prior to travel, we will share this information with you during your referral meeting. Please be sure to review this information with a physician or medical professional knowledgeable about the health and adjustment issues of children adopted from Russia. We are not able to provide any screening or pre-adoptive medical evaluation of the information we receive, as WHFC does not have medical specialists on staff. Your family is also responsible for any consultation fees as part of this evaluation.

When you meet your child/ren, you will receive a medical summary and perhaps learn something about their social history. Expect to receive little or no birth parent information. However, you will be given ample time to observe your child/ren and ask questions of the orphanage physician and caregivers. We encourage you to contact a physician or medical professional in the US who is knowledgeable about the health and adjustment issues of children adopted from Russia well in advance of your expected travel date, so that he or she will be available to review your child/ren’s medical information while you are in Russia. You will also be allowed to photograph and videotape your child/ren during your trip to provide to a US physician for evaluation and consultation.

Information received while in Russia
Medical information – While it is very possible that you will not receive any medical information prior to meeting you child, you will have access to thorough information when your travel. You will meet with the Orphanage Doctor who will present you with a summary of the child’s medical history. At this time, you will receive information on height, weight, head circumference and any significant medical issues noted during examinations. Children are tested for HIV, Hepatitis B and C. While meeting with the Orphanage Doctor you will also have the opportunity to ask questions of the doctor regarding the child’s condition and prognosis.

Developmental information – While many of the diagnoses that Russian children are given seem developmental in nature, there is no formal developmental testing report in Russia. It is common for psycho-motor and psycho-speech delays to be noted. You will be able to make a personal assessment of the child’s development while you are visiting with him/her.

Photographs – You will meet your child in person and be able to take as many photographs as you like. These can be helpful to doctors who are helping you evaluate the medical information.

Video – You will meet your child in person and be able to take as much video as you like. These can be helpful to doctors who are helping you evaluate the medical information.

Social history – The circumstances resulting in a child’s need for out-of-home care are usually due to a crisis in his or her birth family. While you will likely receive some general information, there is often little detailed information available about your child’s specific birth family circumstances. You may be able to learn more about why your child/ren became available for adoption while in Russia. That is, you have the right to ask the orphanage director and/or physician questions and request access to your child/ren’s medical file. However, recognize that it is also possible for you to receive conflicting, incomplete or inaccurate information.

WHFC’s Disclosure Policy
WHFC has a full disclosure policy and will provide you with any information we receive on your child. We advocate for full disclosure of every child’s background information, and continue to work with child welfare officials and social workers in other countries around our full disclosure requirements and those of the Hague Convention. However, please understand that cultural differences and errors in reporting may result in either undisclosed information or information revealed only when you travel to your child’s birth country at the time of placement. You may also be able to learn more about why your child became available for adoption during your trip. You have the right to ask questions and request access to your child’s medical file; the orphanage doctor and caretakers will also be available to meet with you, review
any records they have and share anecdotal information and impressions. However, recognize that it is also possible for you to receive conflicting, incomplete or inaccurate information. If you do receive more information about your child, please share what you learn with us.

Common Health Considerations and Risks
It is important for you to be aware of both the short- and long-term health concerns of children adopted from Russia. It is common in Russia for children with the potential for normal growth and development to have one or more “diagnoses” (often neurological) written into their medical history. Health risks will vary considerably according to your child’s age, experiences before and during government care and his or her resilience. Not all health risks can be identified prior to placement.

Medical – Medical history about the birth family is typically unavailable in international adoption; therefore, genetic risk factors are unknown. In addition, pre-natal history is usually unavailable. Inadequate pre-natal care is very common due to poverty and lack of access to medical services. Some children may have been exposed to alcohol, drugs or other substances used by the birth mother during pregnancy. Any of these pre-natal risks can result in low birth weight, smaller overall size and/or complications after birth. Medical testing and diagnosis are less sophisticated in many countries and undiagnosed health conditions may be present.

Children considered “healthy” by child welfare providers in other countries may have medical conditions common to life in an orphanage. Children residing in a group setting are at risk for treatable medical conditions such as gastroenterological disorders, skin infections, respiratory system infections, head lice and malnutrition at the time of placement. These types of conditions spread quickly in institutional settings and may not be treated by caretakers because they lack the resources.

We make every effort to refer a child to you who is in keeping with your home study recommendations. However, given that medical systems in the US and Russia are so different, it is possible for physicians there to believe a child has the potential for normal growth and development, whereas physicians in the US may feel that the child has a higher than average risk for certain medical conditions. WHFC has a full disclosure policy and will provide you with any medical information we receive on your child. Common conditions/issues seen in Russia include prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol, prenatal exposure to disease, prematurity, and small growth parameters including small head circumference.

When you receive your child’s medical information in Russia, we require you to consult with a US physician, medical professional or international adoption clinic in the US familiar with the health and adjustment issues of children adopted Eastern European countries and the higher risk medical conditions found there. Families will be provided with a list of some doctors and clinics with experience with children adopted internationally.

Developmental/Educational – Many internationally adopted children have multiple risk factors, including less than optimal conditions in utero, malnutrition, early deprivation, institutional care and multiple language transitions. Most children exhibit some short-term delays in growth and development. The underlying cause of developmental delays may not be apparent at the time of referral or placement. Most children make rapid progress when given adequate stimulation. Nevertheless, some children may have educational needs diagnosed during their school years and will need your support to reach their maximum potential.

Behavioral – Most children entering a family through international adoption have experienced chaos, confusion and/or trauma in their lives and may exhibit difficult behavior. They are at risk for attachment difficulties and psychological struggles related to past trauma. A structured, stable and predictable environment, time and consistent parenting will offer a sense of security and protection to your child. Over time, most children develop trust in their new families and their behavior and happiness will improve. However, some children may have behavioral, emotional or mental health needs for a more extended period of time or at different stages in their development.

Due to the health risks of the children in Russia, all families applying to the Russia program will be asked to sign a Supplemental Agreement Regarding Health of Children. This document will be generated to
specifically reflect the recommendation listed in your WHFC Home Study and will be provided to you at the time of Dossier preparation. For more information regarding this Supplemental Agreement please contact a member of the Russia Program Team.

**WHFC Horizon Kids: Children Available Today**

In general, families are put on a waiting list to receive the referral of a child. However, it is possible for you to bypass this list if you wish to adopt a “waiting child.” Our waiting children – WHFC Horizon Kids – have been identified by WHFC or child welfare officials from a given country as children who are most in need of homes.

We have information on dozens of Horizon Kids from nearly every country we work in, ranging in age from infants to teens, and are looking for families who are open to and capable of meeting the unique needs of these children. Some have significant special needs; others have mild, correctable conditions or are waiting because they are boys, older children (often age 4 or older) or part of a sibling group. *Many of these children have the potential for normal growth and development!* In our Russia program, Horizon Kids are often waiting because they have moderate to severe medical needs. Infants who are HIV positive or have other serious medical conditions may also become available for adoption.

There are many reasons to consider a waiting child. As noted, you are likely to receive a referral sooner than you would through the standard referral process. You can also identify the specific child you wish to adopt from our Horizon Kids profiles, and will be given detailed medical information on that child. In addition, eligibility requirements are usually more flexible.

You will be eligible for the referral of a waiting child once you have a completed home study and USCIS approval. We encourage you to speak with your social worker about our Horizon Kids toward the end of your home study process. Or, for more information, please:

- Register online at whfc.org to learn more
- View our online presentation
- Participate in our teleconference series
- Visit one of our regional offices to see profiles of these children
- Speak with families who have adopted a waiting child
- Contact a member of our Horizon Kids team:
  - Jennifer M Doane • (781)697-0480 • jdoane@whfc.org

The government in Russia is often not comfortable giving agencies children's information in order to list them as “waiting children.” However this does not mean there are not children waiting due to special needs or age. We often know of additional children who are waiting but we are unable to post them on our list. If you are a family that would be open and interested in adopting a child with some special needs, please discuss this with the Russia Clinical Manager.

**Eligibility Requirements for Adoptive Parents**

To adopt from Russia, you must submit a small dossier or “preliminary packet” for approval by the Russian government. The dossier is a set of original, region-specific documents required by adoption authorities before an adoption can move forward. The WHFC Russia Program Staff provides a great deal of assistance in preparing this packet. Once your dossier is submitted and approved by WHFC, it will be forwarded to Russia for translation and submission to a regional Department of Education. The Department of Education will then refer a child/ren to you and issue dates for you to travel to receive the official referral and permission to visit the child in the orphanage. A Russian judge will make the final decision on whether to approve the adoption during your second trip to Russia. Please note that Russian laws regarding parent eligibility are vague and open to interpretation by individual adoption officials and judges. The documents that you will prepare will be specific to the region that you will adopt from.

The following eligibility requirements exist for applicants who wish to adopt from Russia:
1. **Age**: Russian authorities strongly prefer that the adoptive mother be no more than 45 years older than the child and that the adoptive father be no more than 50 years older. Exceptions to this may be made when a family is interested in adopting an older child or a child with significant medical or special needs.

2. **Marriage**: Married couples and single women may apply. There is no minimum length of marriage required. Single applicants who have a non-relative of the same gender living in the home will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Openly gay or lesbian applicants will not be accepted by Russian adoption officials. Applicants with two or more divorces will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

3. **Physical and Mental Health**: All applicants must be in good physical and mental health. Applicants with contagious, progressive or debilitating diseases are not eligible for this program. In addition, those with chronic medical conditions, even conditions well managed with medication, may not be eligible. Moreover, applicants with any past condition must provide documentation from a physician that they are “cured” or have been in “remission” for at least 10 years, and have a positive prognosis and normal life expectancy.

   Anyone being treated for any mental health issue may not be eligible to adopt from Russia. This includes applicants taking medication to treat depression or anxiety disorders. In addition, applicants may not be eligible if a member of their immediate family (parents and/or siblings) has a complex history of health issues, mental health or alcohol/drug abuse. It is difficult to make generalizations about eligibility in Russia. Please contact a member of the Russia Team to discuss your eligibility if you have any medical or mental health issues. As we work in 8 different regions we may be able to find several regions which may be more flexible about specific health or mental health issues.

4. **Criminal History**: All applicants should have no recent criminal history. Those with even a single minor arrest older than 10 years will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Please note that applicants approved by WHFC are still subject to approval by the Russian government and court system. Please contact a member of the Russia Team to discuss your eligibility if you have been arrested for any reason.

5. **Medical Exam of Adoptive Parent(s) in Russia**: All of the regions where we work require a medical letter that includes the signature of 8 different medical specialists confirming that applicants are in good health. In most cases, you will undergo a medical exam while in Russia, and the physicians there will issue the necessary letter. WHFC will make an appointment for each applicant at a professional, European-style clinic to obtain this document. The exam usually takes place on the second trip, just prior to the court hearing, and costs approximately $500-700 per applicant. Please be advised that some regions may require a more extensive exam requiring a chest X-ray and bloodwork. In most cases we are able to have families complete blood work and x-rays in the US and carry their results with them.

   In addition, many judges are requesting that families have an evaluation by either a US Psychiatrist or Psychologist. Usually this is a simple letter from the Psychologist but in some cases it may involve testing such as a standardized psychological assessment, called the MMPI (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory), be included in the documentation for court. The MMPI, which costs between $200-1000 per applicant, is a multiple choice test administered by a licensed psychologist. Other regions are requesting a letter from a psychologist describing the applicant’s mental health status.

6. **Citizenship**: At least one applicant must be a US citizen. If one parent was born and raised into adulthood in another country and holds citizenship there, he or she will likely be asked to obtain extensive documentation from that country. This applicant should have a family member still residing there who can obtain documentation from the government with little notice. WHFC does not recommend the Russia Program if you do not have the ability to meet this requirement.

7. **Home**: The home must include a bedroom for the child, separate from that of the parents. No more than 2 children per bedroom.
**How Children Are Referred For Adoption**

In Russian all international adoption is overseen by a governmental agency. In most regions this is called the Ministry of Education and Science although there are some variations. Before being eligible for adoption by foreigners, Russian law requires that after children have been legally freed for adoption, they be registered with local authorities for 2 months and with the Federal Ministry of Education and Science and for another 6 months to allow Russian families the opportunity to adopt or foster them. If a child is not adopted or fostered within this 8 month time period, the child becomes eligible for international adoption.

Each family will have their preliminary packet registered with a regional branch of the Ministry of Education and Science. The Ministry assigns referrals of specific children to specific families based on the family’s request and the order in which the family was registered in that region. The Wide Horizons representative in that region is notified of the match and they in turn notify the Wide Horizons Case Manager. Families are contacted immediately by their Case Manager.

**When You Can Expect the Referral of a Child**

**Preliminary Packet Submission and Processing by Russia**

After you complete your home study, it will be forwarded to the Russia Team. The Team will review your home study including age and number of children requested. Based on this information and your own personal history such as marital status, health, mental health, and criminal history, the Team will select a region that is likely to be the best fit for your family. The Russia Team is familiar with the dynamics of each region and therefore which region will be the best process for your family. You will be contacted by a Russia Case Manager within 1-2 weeks of completion of your home study. The Case Manager will guide you through the process of compiling the dossier, or “preliminary packet” for that region. WHFC provides a great deal of assistance in the gathering of this first packet. Your Case Manager will complete part of the packet for you and will prepare instructions and other documents for you to complete. After your preliminary paperwork is completed, it will be reviewed by your Case Manager and forwarded to Russia. Your documents will be translated and registered for the adoption of a child. Since the decision about which region to send your dossier to is made on a program level, families are expected to be open to a child from any region. If you have previously adopted a child/ren from Russia or are of Russian heritage and were raised in a specific region, you may request that your dossier be registered in that region. We will do our best to honor this request, but circumstances may prohibit you from adopting from that region.

**I-600A/I-600 Procedures**

As part of your preliminary packet, you will need to complete and file an I-600A Petition with your local office of US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Approval of the I-600A Petition, known as your Notice of Favorable Determination or Notice of Favorable Disposition, is valid for 18 months. Fingerprinting is also required for USCIS approval. Fingerprints are valid for 15 months from the date of your initial appointment.

It is your responsibility to keep your USCIS approval and fingerprints current, as both must be valid before travel. We suggest you refile the I-600A Petition 3 months before the Notice of Favorable Determination expires (the earliest date it can be refilled), and get updated fingerprints 3 months prior to expiration as well. This will help ensure that your approval and fingerprints do not expire while you are in Ethiopia, which could cause delays in the adoption process.

**Waiting Time**

The average waiting time for the referral of a child of any age is 0-6 months from the time your completed preliminary packet is submitted to the regional Ministry of Education in Russia. Families requesting sibling groups will likely wait for a similar amount of time. Current wait times are always subject to change.

**The Legal Process In Russia**
The legal process in Russia begins once you sign the official Russian paperwork accepting your child’s referral. This is done at the end of your first trip to Russia after you have met your child. Prior to traveling you will also sign Wide Horizons paperwork accepting the invitation to travel. This is separate and does not move the legal process forward.

After you return to the United States after your first trip, you will be working closely with your Case Manager to prepare the documents required by the court in your child’s region. Likewise, case workers in Russia are preparing necessary paperwork regarding the child. These lists of documents can be long and involved but you will have the support and guidance of your Wide Horizons Case Manager to help you complete them as quickly as possible. It is important to remember that the speed in which you can complete paperwork is directly related to how quickly you can return to Russia for court. When the first round of paperwork is completed it is sent to Russia where it is translated, certified, and submitted to the judge. The judge reviews it carefully and may ask for additional documentation and/or issue a court date.

When the court date has been issued, you will travel back to Russia to attend this hearing. Typically the wait between a first trip and returning for court is between 3 and 6 months. If you are married, both parents must attend. The court hearing may last anywhere from 30 minutes to 3 hours. You will be expected to answer questions relevant to your adoption process during the hearing, such as why you are adopting, why you have chosen to adopt from Russia, personal information about your family structure and economic capacity to care for a child, etc. Single parents should expect a lengthier court process, as they will also be asked why they are not currently married, who will be a role model of the opposite gender for their child and how they plan to support their child independently. At the conclusion of the hearing the judge will announce the decision. This court decision is the milestone signifying that your child’s adoption is full and final under the laws of the country. To date, all WHFC adoption cases have ultimately been approved. However, please understand that denial through court without recourse is a possible outcome. The judge is the ultimate decision-making authority.

By Russian law, all civil court decisions become final after a 30-day appeal period; this is also true with adoption cases. In fact, the 30-day appeal period will be enforced in almost all cases. This means that the adoption decree and necessary paperwork (birth certificate, passport, US visa) will not be issued until 30 calendar days plus one business day after the court hearing. Our representative will advocate to have the appeal period shortened or waived, but you should assume that the appeal period WILL NOT BE WAIVED. Parents are not able to take custody of the child until the appeal period is complete. For most families this 30-day appeal period means that families return to the US immediately after court to wait out the 30-days. Then one or both parents travel to Russia for a final trip to bring the child home.

The number of incidents of Russian children abused or neglected at the hands of their American adoptive parents has received quite a bit of rightfully negative publicity both here and in Russia. With growing concern about these cases, Russian authorities want to make certain that every adoption by every agency is completed legally and ethically, with thorough investigation into the adoptive parents and the post adoption supervision and resources available. WHFC recognizes the importance of having each adoption case carefully and thoroughly scrutinized by the proper authorities in Russia. This oversight is integral to ensuring that international adoption remains an option for children who have no hope for a permanent home in Russia.

**Meeting Your Child**

You will meet your child at the orphanage for the first time, the day after you arrive in Russia on your first trip. Typically this occurs after you have met the orphanage doctor/director however, at times it can happen simultaneously. After this initial meeting, we anticipate that you will visit your son or daughter several times and be given the opportunity to consult with the caregivers regarding your child’s specific personality, likes, and dislikes. During this first trip, you will not assume caretaking responsibilities for your child. During your second or third trip to Russia, after the appeal period is over, you will take custody of your child. There is little time spent by the orphanage on transition so this can be a stressful and
difficult time for your child. Your Wide Horizons Case Manager will help prepare you by giving you suggestions of things that can ease your child’s transition.

**Travel to Russia**

You will make 3 trips to Russia in order to fulfill your child/ren’s adoption requirements. For married couples, both members of the couple must be present on the first and second trips; one or both parents may travel for the third and final trip.

**First Trip:** You can expect to travel to Russia to meet your child 2-6 weeks after you receive news of your referral. On average, most families travel approximately 2-4 weeks after the referral. You will have little notice prior to your travel date – typically about 10-14 days before travel.

Your first trip will be approximately 5-7 days in length. The purpose of this trip is to meet and observe your child and make known your intention to adopt the child. After meeting your child, meeting with the orphanage director/doctor, consulting with a US doctor, and speaking with your WHFC Case Manager you will make a decision about moving forward with the adoption of this child. When you decide to accept the referral of your child, you will sign documents before a notary in Russia. Those documents will be submitted by our representative to the local Department of Education and court to initiate the next steps in the adoption process.

**Second Trip:** Your second trip will occur once the judge schedules a court date for the adoption hearing. Typically, there are 3 - 6 months between these the two trips, but it can be shorter or longer. Families must arrive in Russia several days before court in order to attend to several last items of business such as required visits to the child in the orphanage and adoptive parent medical examinations. For most families this trip is 5-7 days. Families return to the US after court to wait out the 30-day appeal period.

**Third Trip:** Roughly 30 days after court, one or both parents return to Russia to bring their child/ren home. This trip also lasts 5-7 days and includes the gathering of some official paperwork such as the official adoption decree and the child’s passport. The family will take custody of the child in his or her region of residence and then travel to Moscow to obtain the child’s US visa to travel to the US.

After your preliminary packet is submitted to WHFC, you need to be prepared to travel, often on very short notice (sometimes less than 1 week) for both the first and second trips. Due to scheduling circumstances in Russia, travel dates may change shortly before a scheduled trip. You should always consult with your Case Manager to confirm tentative travel dates before purchasing airline tickets. The court date in Russia is not flexible, and inability to attend the scheduled court hearing may jeopardize your adoption. WHFC will receive specific travel dates from our representative. You may then apply for a visa and make arrangements to travel on the designated dates. As noted, we require families to use the visa support services of a travel agency familiar with Russian adoption travel.

**While in Russia**

A well-networked team of professions work with families while in Russia. The team includes the Wide Horizons Case Manager, the Wide Horizons representative in the region in Russia, translators, drivers, and travel agents.

Wide Horizons has experienced representatives in each of the regions where we work. These representatives are employees of the agency who work with our adoptive families to guide and assist them through the entire adoption process in Russia. You will be met at the airport by a driver or your representative. Your regional representative will do everything s/he can to make your stay in Russia as comfortable as possible. Each representative is an expert at facilitating the adoption process in the region they oversee. They will make all necessary appointments and assist you in obtaining all necessary adoption-related paperwork in Russia. In addition, the representative will accompany you to all adoption-related meetings and appointments. Some of the representatives do the translation for families while other representatives have experienced translators who work with them.
Wide Horizons requires that families work with a travel agent who is experienced in Russian Adoption Travel. We can provide a list of travel agencies that other families have worked with. Once a family selects a travel agency, we coordinate directly with the family and the travel agent regarding schedules. At times, the regional representative may also assist with arranging travel or lodging within Russia.

Travel Advisories
While we are always aware of conditions in the countries where we work, we may not know if travel advisories have been issued or are still in effect for a specific country. All applicants are strongly encouraged to check with the US Department of State just prior to travel for any advisories that may have been issued. Current travel advisories for Russia and other countries can be accessed via the Internet at www.travel.state.gov.

Mandatory Preparation
All WHFC Russia Program applicants are required to complete online “webinar” courses, as well as participate in several phone calls with their Case Manager in preparation for travel to Russia. This includes families returning to Russia to adopt another child. Families who live near Waltham, MA are encouraged to come to our office to meet with their Case Manager in person.

Visa Application for Adoptive Parents
All travelers must obtain a visa before entering Russia. A visa is a document issued by the Russian Consulate or Embassy allowing you to visit the country for a specified period of time. It lists your entry/exit dates, vital information and passport details and is attached to your passport. After you submit your dossier, the case manager will send you detailed information about obtaining your visa(s) and identify a travel agency that can assist you. However, you will not be able to actually apply for a visa at this time. We require that you use visa support services through a travel agency that specializes in travel to Russia, as they are able to provide a letter of invitation, accept credit card payment and FedEx your passport(s) and visa application(s) to the Russian Consulate. The fee for this service is approximately $95 per visa. This is in addition to the visa fee that ranges between $150-$300 per applicant. Depending on how quickly you need to obtain a visa and the type of visa required by the region there may be additional costs for expedited service.

After you receive your referral and confirmed travel dates, the case manager will provide you with the exact information you need to initiate your visa application(s). In most cases you will be required to obtain a single-entry visa only. This means that you will need to apply for a new visa each time you travel (2 or 3 times).

As part of the visa application process, each applicant will need to indicate if s/he has any arrest history. If any arrest history is indicated, the applicant will need to write a letter of explanation and possibly be requested to appear in person at the Embassy or Consulate for an interview. Please consult with your travel agent if you have any past arrest history, before completing the application form.

Obtaining Your Child’s US Visa
All Russian children adopted by US citizens are required to obtain a US visa before entering the US. Our staff in Russia will help you file the I-600 Petition with supporting documents at the US Embassy in Moscow at the end of your final trip. At least one parent (who is a US Citizen) must accompany your child to Moscow for a total of 3-4 business days, where he or she will be required to have a medical exam by a US Embassy-approved physician. Our Moscow team will make arrangements for this exam. After the results are obtained, you will file the required paperwork with the US Embassy, which normally takes 2 full business days to issue the visa.

The US Embassy will request additional blood work or testing if your child has ever tested positive for certain infectious diseases. Specifically, if your child has ever tested positive for either Hepatitis B or C antibodies and/or antigens, he or she child will have to undergo an additional blood test for Hepatitis at the physician’s office in Moscow. Similarly, if your child has ever tested positive for HIV, an additional test will need to be conducted at a lab in Moscow that is approved by the US Embassy. This will require an additional day in Moscow.
Registering Children in Moscow
All children are required to be registered with the appropriate Russian authorities shortly after the completion of the adoption. The law allows for this to take place in either Russia or the US. However, only the Moscow region is now requiring that registration be done prior to the child leaving Russia. For children adopted in all our other regions the registration will take place in the US after arrival. Registration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs occurs after the child’s US visa is obtained and takes 2 business days to complete. Our staff in Moscow will assist families with this service. WHFC will reimburse $50 to families who register their child/ren in Moscow, as our registration service will not be necessary upon return to the US. We will assist all other families with registration at the appropriate Russian Consulate or Embassy immediately upon their return to the US.

Additional Travelers
Please speak with your case manager before making any travel arrangements if you are considering bringing along another friend or relative, including your child/ren. It is likely that only the adoptive parents will be able to visit their child/ren at the orphanage and/or attend any official adoption-related meetings, and only the adoptive parents will be allowed to attend the court hearing. If you are considering bringing your child/ren, we recommend that you travel with another adult who can care for them while you are at adoption-related appointments and/or if you need “adult only” time to discuss major decisions related to your adoption. You will incur all additional expenses associated with additional travelers.

Other Preparations
While waiting for your referral, begin preparing for your child/ren’s arrival! Use the time to research Russian history and culture, as well as identify resources that will be invaluable once you are home. If you are adopting an older child/ren, you will want to find someone who speaks Russian to help with the transition.

With any international travel, there may be some important vaccinations you should receive before your trip. Since some vaccinations require multiple injections over several months, we recommend that you consult with your physician and/or travel clinic as soon as possible.

As previously noted, we will require you to consult with a physician or medical professional in the US who is knowledgeable about the health and adjustment issues of children adopted from Russia or former Soviet countries. It is important to contact this person well in advance of your expected travel date, so that he or she will be available to review your child/ren’s medical information while you are in Russia.

Post Adoption Resources

Community
You become part of the WHFC community after you arrive home with your child. There are strong networks of families who have adopted from Eastern Europe – and you will be able to take advantage of opportunities to connect with them as well. We know that adoption is a lifelong journey, and we look forward to supporting you throughout that journey.

Newsletter
WHFC issues a post-adoption newsletter to provide support and communication around post-adoption issues. This is one way for you to stay connected with us. We also use these newsletters as a chance to share the personal adoption stories of families.

whfc.org
Be sure to visit our Website regularly for the latest information on post-adoption resources and events.
After Your Child Comes Home

Post Placement Requirements
The post-placement supervision period after the arrival of your child in the US is currently 3 years. During this time, your social worker will be visiting with you and in contact by phone and email to gather information required by Russia’s post-placement reporting guidelines, which are strictly enforced. Specifically, you are responsible for providing information about your child’s health, development and adjustment, including photographs. This occurs at 1 month, 3 months, 6 months, and once a year for 3 years after arrival at minimum.

At the end of the 3-year anniversary of the issuance of the adoption court decree, and until your child becomes 18 years of age, additional post-placement reports can be requested by the appropriate authorities of the Russian Federation on a case-by-case basis.

Legalization of Adoption and US Citizenship
Your child’s adoption is full and final under the laws of the Russian Federation before the child enters the US. Children arrive in the US on an IR-3 visa, making them eligible for US citizenship upon entry. One requirement of the WHFC Russia Program is that adoptive families not relinquish their child’s Russian citizenship until the child turns 18. Your child/ren will need to be registered with the Russian Consulate, either in Moscow or shortly after arriving in the US. This will not affect your child/ren’s ability to gain US citizenship. As with any international adoption, WHFC highly recommends that adoptive parents re-finalize the adoption of their child/ren under the laws of their state of permanent residence. Social workers can provide more information on this process.

Program Fees Related to Child Placement

Program Fees Related to Child Placement
Please refer to the WHFC Russia Program Fee Schedule (attached), Child Placement and Post-Placement sections, for fee descriptions and amounts payable upon application to the program and upon referral. You can also access this information at www.whfc.org/InfoRequestDownload.htm [click on Guide to Adoption Services and Programs and select RUSSIA].

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of our Russia Program. Please do not hesitate to contact any member of the WHFC Russia Program team if you have questions, comments or concerns. We look forward to helping you grow your family through adoption!