

# International adoption with local connections

## How Christian families make a difference in the lives of children around the world

by BRENDA OELSCHLAGER

**B**ryan and Mindy Stout, from the small village of Franconia, Pennsylvania, knew adoption would be part of their lives very early in their relationship. Both came from families that had experience in either foster care or adoption and their hearts were open to the idea of creating a caring, secure place for an adoptive family to grow. "We knew that adopting a child was something the Lord was calling us to do," said Bryan. When and where they would answer that call led them on a journey full of blessings and many life lessons.

When their biological daughter, Elysa, was about five years old, the Stouts began to focus on the idea of expanding their family. After much research, thought, and prayer, it was clear that God was leading us to international adoption," said Mindy. They considered the many troubled areas of the world and reflected on the spiritual aspect of being able to make a difference in the life of one child. But where in the world would they find their child? She explained that for Chinese adoptions, the parents must be 30 years old. "We were too young at the time to qualify," she explained. Vietnam was closed for adoptions at the time and the Russian process was very slow due to bureaucratic "red tape." Through an agency called America World, the Stouts found out about the Ukraine adoption program. In March 2005 they filed the first official forms to begin what would be a two-and-a-half year process.

### THE WAITING GAME

Bryan remarked, "it was a time of tremendous personal and spiritual growth for both of us, filled with long periods of waiting, sifting through mountains of paperwork, and still more waiting." But for those who wait upon the Lord, his timing is usually perfect. "When we were invited to travel to Ukraine in June of 2007, we knew that we were much better prepared in a lot of areas to move forward with the process than we had been when we first started," Bryan commented.

When Bryan, Mindy, and Elysa left for Ukraine on June 1, 2007, they expected to stay in the country approximately five weeks to finalize the process and return to the U.S. with a little girl under the age of two. "Little did we know that God's plan for our family was about to unfold

into something much different," said Bryan. With the political turmoil of the young democratic society, major transitions were taking place in the Ukrainian adoption authority. After their first appointment with the government officials near Kiev, they were told that very few children were being offered for adoption and the waiting continued for four more weeks.

Mindy recalls the emotional roller coaster that kept them wondering why they had been called to Ukraine if a child was not available. "We spent a lot of

church, Franconia Mennonite, were especially supportive in prayer and encouragement.

### ONE SPECIAL CHILD

On July 4th, a call came through to the Stouts from the adoption authority to let them know there was one child available for them to meet. "Since the very beginning we had been praying that the Lord would very clearly show us what child he had in mind for our family. We knew making that choice would be very difficult. But he had taken away that burden

August 4, 2007, after twelve long weeks abroad, they gained official custody of Avery and prepared for their trip home.

Elysa, who is currently a second grader at Penn View Christian School in Souderton, came back from the "best summer vacation ever" with her brand new brother. While she was a bit disappointed at first that she didn't gain a sister, she said Avery is pretty much fun. According to Bryan, "Avery is a perfect fit with our family. His personality is still being formed,



Mindy, Elysa, Avery, and Bryan Stout are happy to be part of God's world-wide family as they share their adoption story with others.

as God works through us so our children will grow to love the Lord." Their conviction for adopting children is something they will always share. "As excited as we are about Avery's adoption, we are saddened by the number of orphans in Ukraine, knowing that so many of them will never experience the security and support of a loving family. It is our prayer that one way or another they will find their way out of the system and into loving families," she added.

### THE UKRAINE CONNECTION

That hope is something both Iryna and Stephen Yagilnicky share with the Stouts. Iryna, a native of Ukraine and founder of the Love Cradle Mission, has committed her life to connecting Ukrainian orphans with loving Christian families and improving the lives of those children who will never be able to leave the system. Her husband, Steve, is her greatest supporter and serves as president of their non-profit organization.

Currently based in Souderton at the mission home next to Immanuel Leidy's Church, the couple will be spending the next year gathering sponsors and promoting their programs around the country. They have found great local support and hope to expand their contact with churches in the Bucks and Montgomery County area.

Steve explained the purpose of Love Cradle Mission is to

provide support for the more than 100,000 orphaned children in Ukraine through partnerships with churches, businesses, civic groups, and caring individuals. Founded in 1996, the organization is registered as a legal humanitarian aid group within the country that has been plagued by political turmoil and economic instability since its independence from the communist rule of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Iryna, who has experienced the horrors of post-communist society in her homeland, explained that children in the government system have very little hope of ever living meaningful lives. Statistics show that only 10% of the orphans adapt to life outside the orphanage while 40% go to prison, 40% struggle with mental problems, 10% commit suicide, and 60-70% of the girls become victims of national and international sex trade.

### POSITIVE CHANGES PROVIDE HOPE

Through their work, Iryna and Steve provide consultation for U.S. families interested in adopting children from Ukraine. They advocate for the rights of the children with the government and have been successful in partnering with churches in the Ukraine to provide special educational and social programs in many orphanages. "Our purpose," Steve explained, "is to create an environment of hope and



Children at one of the many orphanages in Ukraine being served by Love Cradle Missions.

time in prayer and conversation, far away from home seeking to understand God's will. Looking back, it was during this intense period of waiting that we experienced even deeper spiritual growth as the Lord worked to open our hearts and minds to be fully accepting of his plan for our family," she said. Family members, friends from home and members of their home

completely and presented us with one child—a precious three-and-a-half-year-old boy," Bryan said with a smile.

With traveling across the country to the orphanage near the border of Slovakia, daily visits with the child and staff, and more paperwork, it would be another month before the Stouts could finally return home with their new son, Avery. On

but we knew from the start he was a perfect match."

As their family continues to grow and adjust to their new situation, the Stouts are ever mindful of the way God has directed their path and prepared them for the many challenges they will continue to face. Mindy said, "we are so thankful for the wonderful support of family and friends that continue to encour-

(continued from page 4)

respect for the children and provide the practical tools for positive change and opportunities for the orphans to achieve their full potential through our humanitarian efforts.”

While Love Cradle Mission cannot promote specific Christian ideals in the orphanages, they have been granted certain privileges. “God has used us as a bridge to allow churches to go into the orphanages with programs,” commented Steve. They are hoping to recruit several Buxmont mission teams to spend time over the summer teaching Vacation Bible school, directing sports camps, and working on construction projects. “We are also developing a hosting program for students from Ukraine to visit with Christian families in the U.S. over the summer or during the holidays so they can experience positive family life situations,” he said.

Individuals, families, church groups, and community organizations are all encouraged to learn more about the work of Love Cradle Mission and find ways to become active participants in the many programs they sponsor as they continue to make a difference one child at a time.

**CHILDREN IN CHINA**

According to the United Nations Children’s Fund, there are over 150 million orphaned children in the world today. Twenty million of those children are in China where one in every seventh child is abandoned. One Montgomery-county based organization has a bold vision to assist Christian families open to adoption and to provide positive alternatives to the state run orphanages in China. Living Hope is a two-part organization founded by Dr. Samuel Fang in 1994 when he put his Christian convictions and Chinese heritage to work for the betterment of Chinese orphans.

According to office Manager, Karen Kulp of Souderton, the adoption agency specializes in Chinese adoption. Over the last

15 years the agency has placed children from China with over 800 U.S. families. “Dr. Fang’s vision has always been to provide a future with hope for as many children as possible. He and his wife have such a heart for China. Their family includes two biological sons and one adopted daughter,” she said.

Living Hope provides assistance to families through the initial adoption screening process, during the visit to China, and follow-up sessions upon returning to the U.S. “China has very high standards for international adoption. At Living Hope we provide families with the support and necessary information to make adoption possible,” said Kulp. She also remarked that adopting families communicate with and support each other through the Living Hope network.

Dr. Fang, having spent his early life in China and struggled through the cultural revolution, has first-hand experience with the kind of hopelessness so many



*Iryna and Stephen Yagilnicky are the founders of the Love Cradle Mission, working to make a difference for the lives of orphans in Ukraine.*

children face. As a Christian, he has felt compelled to use his gifts to create hope for as many children as possible who are not eligible for adoption because of their age or exiting family circumstances. With a vision for change, he has used his Chinese connections and influence with the adoption system to begin a

new type of training program for orphans. Through Living Hope International, four training schools, or “homes” as Fang calls them, have been started in various locations in China.

These homes are run by specially selected staff members and teachers who provide a family-

style setting for six to eight children. In these homes, the children can develop close relationships, experience high quality education and tutoring, and grow into successful, well-developed young adults, ready to participate in society outside the orphanage walls.

As a Christian organization in communist China, Living Hope has been able to set an example through its humanitarian aid. “While we cannot talk about Christianity as part of our program,” Fang cautions, “we can set an example. By putting our thinking and actions to work, we can train the children to do what is right and instill our vision of caring for and sharing with others into their lives.” Fang explains that Living Hope International’s long-term vision is to train the children to be

China’s future leaders. “We want them to catch the vision and carry on the work with the children,” he said.

Opportunities for interested groups and individuals to work at the orphanages as summer camp advisors or cultural exchange guests are offered through Living Hope. The non-profit organization also accepts any financial support for its programs.



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*Living Hope International is currently operating three orphanages in China to provide abandoned children with a loving family environment, better education, and marketable skills to ensure their success in society.*

**LOVE CRADLE MISSION**

Anyone interested in learning more about the Ukraine connections and Love Cradle Mission is invited to visit the web site at [www.lovecradleint.org](http://www.lovecradleint.org) or contact the Yagilnicky’s at 215-723-0263.

*Financial donations are tax deductible and can be addressed to:*  
 Love Cradle Mission  
 276 West Cherry Lane  
 Souderton, PA 18964



The Living Hope headquarters is located at 449 Pennsylvania Avenue, Fort Washington, PA 19034

For more information about Chinese adoption opportunities with the Living Hope Adoption Agency visit [www.livinghopeadoption.org](http://www.livinghopeadoption.org) or call 1-888-886-8086.

To learn more about Living Hope International and the expanding programs at Chinese orphanages sponsored by the organization, visit [www.livinghopeintl.org](http://www.livinghopeintl.org) or call 215-540-8810.



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