



Lutheran Social Services of WI and Upper Michigan

ADOPTION AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

Building bridges between cultures, helping to create the miracle of family.

What is the Ambassador Program?

We believe that all children regardless of age, race, gender, or other conditions deserve a safe, loving, permanent family to call their own. The LSS Ambassador Program is an innovative approach to the recruitment of families for International Adoption in the Philippines, Kenya and Eastern Europe. The process takes 8 to 12 months from the time of acceptance by the government to the time of the referral.

Why does the program exist?

Abundance of older children

Many children who are available for adoption are over the age of 9 – many are waiting with siblings; age is a barrier to adoption and older children require specialized recruitment efforts in order to find a family.

Cultural barriers

Older children have stronger influence of culture that will follow them into an adoptive family home and adoptive parents can be better prepared as parents if they experience children within their cultural context.

Personalization

Older children need a personal introduction to potential adoptive families in order to increase their likelihood of being adopted. Experiential information acquired during the trip about older children, is invaluable in efforts to find a family for a child.

Advocacy

Adult volunteers (Ambassadors) can become resources and advocates for older children by reaching out and sharing their experiences with older children to their communities and extended family members.

1

Adult volunteers (Ambassadors) from the US travel to the designated country and spend approximately 10 days with a pre-identified group of children who are waiting for adoptive placements.

2

The volunteers and children, as well as two staff from LSS, a social worker from each participating child caring facility and a staff representative from the Inter-Country Adoption Board participate in a "cultural" experience over a 10 day period. This experience includes visits to the child caring facilities, an educational "field trip" to places of significant historical and cultural importance, and a "camp or retreat" experience to a resort where the children and adults relax and play together.

3

Once Ambassadors return, they will act as an advocate for the children to identify prospective forever families. The Ambassadors then prepare families through sharing family history, developmental status of the child, medical reports and personal experiences with the child. Prospective adoptive parents are equipped to meet their children in the child's environment, and look forward to meeting the caring adults in that child's life that they have heard so much about.

4

Travel by the prospective parent(s) to receive the child is required. The trip is well organized and guided by agency representatives. Families receive placement of their child upon arrival and finalize their adoption in the US 6 to 10 months after placement.

How does the program work?



www.lssadopt.org

FOREVER FAMILY An Adoption Ambassador Program Story

Through the Adoption Ambassador Program, LSS had a role in bringing this family together, and drastically improving Jerome's life, and the lives of his family.

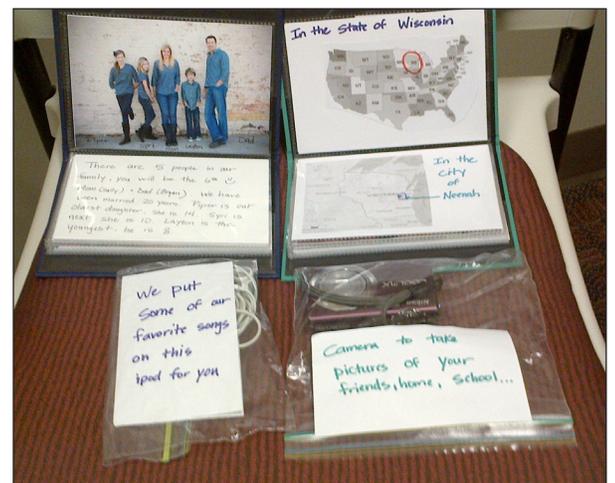
I first met Jerome at the Welcome Lunch for the 2012 Philippine Ambassador Trip. He was a beautiful boy who appeared quiet and shy. In the two weeks we spent with him, I discovered what I initially perceived as shyness was really a very laid back, introspective, and calm demeanor. There were 6 other ambassadors on the trip, and by the end each of us had fallen in love with Jerome.

Jerome is 14 years old, and while it is typically very difficult to find adoptive families for older children, it is by the grace of God that Jerome has found his forever family through the LSS Adoption Ambassador Program. We were fortunate to find a family in Wisconsin for Jerome very quickly after our return to the United States. His mom is very nurturing; his dad matches Jerome in their mutual love and aptitude for music; and his siblings are very kind children who will be very supportive and helpful to Jerome as he makes this huge transition back into a family.

Jerome's family had a remarkably smooth adoption process and was officially matched with Jerome by the InterCountry Adoption Board in the Philippines very quickly. Unfortunately, in the world of international adoption "very quickly" means a year and a half. Jerome's family knew immediately he was meant to be their son, but many times the children are not told they have a potential adoptive family to avoid the heartbreak of potentially losing that family before they ever meet them. Jerome had no idea he had a family wanting to adopt him.

Jerome's family was officially matched with him just two weeks ago. They are relieved and excited to have gone so far, but mostly excited that Jerome will finally know he has a family waiting for him. I am on the way to the Philippines as I write this for a conference and to visit all the kids from the 2012 trip who are not home yet. I am taking Jerome's family's official acceptance of him and will hand deliver their acceptance paperwork to the InterCountry Adoption Board.

Jerome's family has also asked me to bring some items (pictured below) to him such as a small ipod loaded with the family's favorite songs, a camera so he can take pictures of his home and school and friends so he will be able to keep all of those in his heart. They also sent two small albums for me to give him which include pictures of his immediate and extended family, his new home, and his new school. The albums also contain a map of the United States with Wisconsin highlighted and a map of Wisconsin with their town highlighted. I will have the honor of bringing all of this to Jerome and to show him the first pictures of his new family.



- Kim Westfahl, LSS Adoption/Birth Parent Manager