

Why Should I Go the Extra Step to

PLACE A CHILD FOR ADOPTION WITH AN AMERICAN MILITARY FAMILY LIVING IN ANOTHER COUNTRY?

An Untapped Permanency Resource

Love knows no boundaries. This simple statement reflects a profound concept that children who are waiting for adoptive families may be able to find the permanent, loving home that they need and deserve with a family who lives in another State or even another country.

A pool of prospective adoptive families that so far has been mostly untapped by States, Territories, and Tribes is American military families—many of whom are living temporarily in other countries—who are interested in adopting children from the U.S. foster care system. Some jurisdictions have been finding creative ways to engage these families in order to achieve permanency for children who are waiting to be adopted by overcoming real and perceived barriers across State and even country borders. An important first step is for child welfare professionals to acknowledge any hesitancy they have about exploring adoption by families who are, or may soon be, living in another country.

Breaking Down Barriers to Adoption by Military Families

Perceived Barrier or Concern

Why would we send *our* children away to another country? It's better for a child to be here in the USA in foster care than having to learn a whole new way of life in another country. These children have had to move enough already.

It's important for children to stay within their own culture.

Why would I place a child with a military family since that would mean that they have to move all of the time?

We already struggle with doing interjurisdictional placements just across State lines. I can't imagine how we'd do international placements or figure out the paperwork and procedural requirements.

Response

American military families are U.S. citizens who are temporarily living outside the U.S. for a tour of duty. In addition to it being fundamentally good practice to seek all possible options for achieving permanency for children in foster care waiting to be adopted, it is a requirement. Section 471 (a)(23) of the Social Security Act requires that a State not “deny or delay the placement of a child for adoption when an approved family is available outside of the jurisdiction.”

Whether a child moves to a family down the street, across town, or in another country, that child experiences having to adapt to a new culture and family life.

Children who are adopted by military families can experience life on a military installation, which in many cases is similar to small-town America. Children adopted by military families living in other countries gain the benefits of learning about a new culture and being increasingly prepared to live in diverse cultures and settings.

Children in foster care already experience many moves without the benefit of having a permanent family. A child who is adopted by a military family will likely still move periodically, but those moves will happen along with their family, who will help the child prepare for, and adjust to, a new setting with the security of a loving family. In addition, military installations are structured essentially the same in all locations, and the Department of Defense schools provide U.S. curricula, so children in military families experience quite a bit of consistency even when their families move. There are also extensive support services available on military installations.

Many of the strategies that agencies currently use to find adoptive families used to be thought of as challenging or too hard to do, and yet many children have been placed with permanent families thanks to dedicated workers overcoming perceived obstacles. There have been many children from foster care placed with military families overseas. It is probably easier than you think.

Our State has no money to place children in other countries.

Keeping children in foster care indefinitely creates many ongoing, direct costs for a child welfare system, so failing to pursue permanency options for children due to costs ignores the financial costs of keeping children in foster care. Short term costs maybe higher, but the long term savings of placing a child in a permanent family outweigh the initial fees. Of course, there are great long-term human costs to children who languish in foster care and age out of foster care without a permanent family.

This just seems too overwhelming and too hard to figure out.

More than 29,000 youth in foster care age out every year with a permanent family; a disproportionate number (compared to the general population) of these young adults end up homeless, incarcerated, undereducated, and perpetrators or victims of crimes. If there are qualified, loving families available to provide permanence to youth in foster care, we should pursue all options for connecting youth with those families, wherever they are.

Reasons to Choose Military Families

- The military is racially diverse, and the colleagues and neighbors of military families are always ready to embrace newcomers.
- They have developed ways to sustain emotional and tangible connections to friends and extended family members, despite distance and periodic moves.
- They have easy access to adoption benefits.
- There are extensive family support resources on military installations.
- Military families tend to be flexible and mission-driven.
- The military community represents diversity in race, culture, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and background. Children can find people of all ethnic backgrounds as well as many multiracial families within this community.
- Housing costs are covered so bringing in additional children is less of a financial consideration.
- Traveling and living abroad are great educational opportunities for the whole family.
- Children are proud to see their new parents in uniform. Many children from foster care have found their niche in the military as well.

How to Get Started

The process for placing a child with a U.S. military family—especially one currently living in another country—may vary depending on where the family is stationed. To learn more about how the process may work:

- Review the AdoptUSKids publication: *Wherever My Family Is: That's Home! Adoption Services for Military Families*, which can be downloaded at: adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/militaryGuide.pdf.
- Contact the National Resource Center for Recruitment and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Parents (NRCRRFAP) at AdoptUSKids for training and technical assistance on all forms of interjurisdictional placements, including with military families based in states or countries other than the child's. Find out more about the NRCRRFAP at adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment.
- Contact organizations such as AdoptUSKids (adoptuskids.org) or The Adoption Exchange (www.adoptex.org) for referrals to agencies that are experienced in working with the U.S. military population. These included: Adopt Abroad, Inc. (www.adopt-abroad.com) and Voice for International Development and Adoptions (VIDA) (www.vidaadoptions.org), to name just a few.
- Explore the website for The National Military Family Association (www.militaryfamily.org/your-benefits/adoption) to review benefits and tips for military families contemplating adoption.



More free resources at:

www.nrcdr.org

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