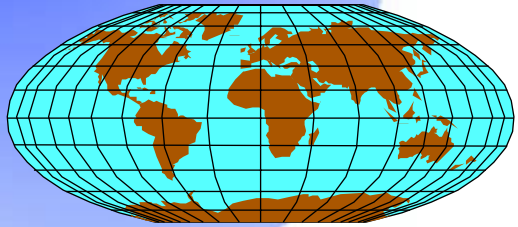




Deaf Children

Who Need Families:



**The Need for Culturally
Competent Child Welfare Services**

**Meeting the Cultural and Communication
Needs of the Deaf Child via the Internet**

Introduction: The Special Needs of Deaf Children

Deaf children have unique needs when they come to the attention of adoption and foster care services. Historically, Deaf children's needs for a rich communication environment have been overlooked by professionals involved in placing Deaf children in substitute families. This information brochure is written for adoption and social work professionals who come in contact with Deaf children and are seeking to find an adoptive or foster home with the Deaf child's "best interest" in mind. It is also written for prospective parents who are interested in bringing a Deaf child into their families.

Research has pointed out that Deaf children develop and thrive in a home environment that is accessible to their need for visual communication. Many unfortunate stories have been recounted of Deaf children growing up in all hearing families without accessible communication and being left out of basic information about their families and the outside world.

Deaf and hearing parents who are familiar and knowledgeable about deafness have been adopting children successfully in the U.S. and Europe for many years. Most of these families communicate with the Deaf child in their country's native sign language. Research shows that Deaf children thrive in this kind of environment where the communication is spontaneous and natural and the Deaf child is encouraged to express himself or herself in a visual, as compared to only a spoken language.

Deaf parents in particular can provide positive role models for their Deaf child, and thus a strong sense of identity. Deaf parents are keenly aware of the educational resources their Deaf child needs, and are strong advocates for the Deaf child. Deaf parents also pass on the rich heritage and culture of the Deaf community in their respective home countries. This cultural and language aspect of matching is essential for a Deaf child's development and provides the best possible opportunity to develop at the same rate as hearing children. This does not mean that Deaf parents do not provide the deaf child with exposure to their national culture (hearing culture); most Deaf parents have hearing relatives, friends, neighbors, and co-workers and are part of their larger hearing environment so that the deaf child is actually bi-

lingual and bi-cultural. Thus, Deaf parents should be more actively recruited for adoptive and foster parents of Deaf children.

The Deaf parents who have already adopted children report that once they meet the child welfare professional and go through the home study process with the help of a sign language interpreter, the professionals become more understanding and their attitudes about them as parents become more positive. Deaf parents find that once they educate the professionals about their capabilities, and the technology they use in the home for communication, the professionals becomes more enthusiastic about placing a child in their home. Technology available today such as teletypewriters (TTY's) for using the telephone, relay operator services, flashing lights to alert the Deaf parent to the baby's cry, the doorbell or smoke detectors have all enhanced the sense of safety and security for Deaf parents.

Ongoing research suggests that Deaf parents function with the same skills and abilities as hearing parents. Once child welfare professionals actually work with Deaf parents, they set aside their own biases in viewing Deaf parents as less competent than hearing parents, and see the value of matching Deaf parents with Deaf children.

The Deaf Adoption News Service

A new and very useful resource for child welfare professionals world wide is the Deaf Adoption News Service (DANS). Developed in 1994, DANS is an electronic news service on the Internet which matches waiting Deaf children with prospective parents.

It is managed by [Jamie Berke](#) a Deaf adoptive mother in the U.S. who volunteers her time to operate the service. So far, DANS has found homes for 16 Deaf children worldwide. DANS lists the general information about the child and the name and address of the agency that represents the child, and also the name of the contact person who is working on the case. Prospective parents who subscribe to the free service then can “surf” the Internet, locate the DANS service, and then contact the local agency that represents the child for more information. If the prospective parents meet the qualifications of the agency, the adoption proceeds according to their policies and the rules of government where the child lives.

DANS does not place the children directly and is not a child placing agency. It simply provides information about waiting Deaf children so that prospective parents can get more information from the local agency. Child placing agencies also find DANS very useful when they have a Deaf child on the waiting list. More and more adoption social workers today are realizing the value of locating families for Deaf children who can meet their special needs for communication and identity.

In 1997 the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), which is endorsed by the United Nations, endorsed the work of the Deaf Adoption News Service. As such, DANS is bound to respect the various world governments' policies and procedures regarding the adoption and fostering of children. Although some governments are reluctant to identify waiting children on the Internet, for fear of the child's privacy being eroded, DANS respects the wishes of various governments not to reveal the child's name, country of origin, or personal background information. The general geographical region where the child is located is identified such as Latin America, Eastern Europe, or Asia. A sample listing that appeared in DANS is given on the next page.

It is hoped that more and more child placing agencies worldwide will learn of the valuable electronic service of DANS and also learn more about the language, communication and cultural identity needs of Deaf people. A reference list is provided for further reading.

Deaf Adoption News Service (DANS) can be reached through:

e-mail:

berke@erols.com

Internet:

<http://www.erols.com/berke/deafchildren.html>

13 February 1999:

Example:

Boy (10045), 12/9/92, Eastern Europe, deaf. Hearing disorder of 3rd grade, deafness of the 3rd grade. Agency: Help The Children, 1350 W Robinhood Dr #2, Stockton CA 95207-5512, Voice (209) 478-5585 FAX (209) 478-5586 (Also Internet: htc1@inreach.com) Contact person: Lois Paul.

Andres, male, date of birth May 1992, Latin America. Deaf, has strabismus and nearsightedness. He is currently in special education classes. "Tender," open to an adoptive family. Agency: Children's Home Society of Minnesota, 2230 Como Ave, St. Paul, MN 55108. (612) 646-6393 (Voice). Photo available. (Also Internet: intchild@chsm.com) Contact person: Norina Giri.

Boy, date of birth 12/30/94, Asia. Deaf, does not speak, and has some development delays. He sits, crawls and seems to be a happy child. Agency: Children's Home Society of Minnesota, 2230 Como Ave, St. Paul, MN 55108. (612) 646-6393 (Voice). Photo available. (Also Internet: intchild@chsm.com) Contact person: Norina Giri.

Girl, date of birth January 2, 1989, Asia. Deaf. Agency: Harrah Family Services, INC. 2123 FM 1960 W., #358 HOUSTON, TX 77090 Phone (281) 580-5044; FAX (281) 580-5020 (Also internet: harrahfs@idt.net) Contact persons: John and Jackie Harrah.

Mecca, female, date of birth October 9, 1990, Africa. Deaf, fluent signer, good student. Agency: West Sands, 481 East 2780, Provo, UT 54604, 801-377-4379 voice; 801-377-8627 fax. Contact person: Wes Whatcott (Also internet: westsands1@juno.com)

Girl, born in October of 1995, Asia. A twin whose parents could not parent her because they were unable to get the necessary operations and help for her congenital facial deformities and her severe hearing impairment (she is not deaf). Agency: Children's Home Society of Minnesota, 2230 Como Ave, St. Paul, MN 55108. (612) 646-6393 (Voice). (Also Internet: intchild@chsm.com) Contact person: Norina Giri.

Girl (10028), date of birth 3/12/98, Eastern Europe, "hearing impaired." Although she's only been tested by observation, the consensus is about a 90% loss. She does make sounds but she's too young to know if oral speech will be a possibility. Agency: Help The Children, 1350 W Robinhood Dr #2, Stockton CA 95207-5512, Voice (209) 478-5585 FAX (209) 478-5586 (Also Internet: htc1@inreach.com)

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World Federation of the Deaf
Commission of Deaf Child Welfare



**Deaf Adoption News Service
(DANS)**

**List of deaf
children**

**Deaf child
found**

**Deaf child
wanted**

**Adoption
procedure**

**State of
origin (country)**

**Receiving
state (country)**

**The Hague Conference
29 May 1993**