

Adoption

Information for Families Wanting to Adopt

Application

The application process to adopt begins with completing the *Application to Adopt a Child* form. The application gathers basic information about you and your family, such as your age, employer and marital status. You are also required to include the following documents together with your application to adopt form:

- copy of birth certificate;
- where married, a copy of your Marriage Certificate;
- if living common-law, a Statutory Declaration setting out the period you have lived common-law;
- if divorced, a copy of the Divorce decree;
- if you are a surviving spouse, a copy of a death certificate of any previous spouse;
- if you have changed your name, copy of proof satisfactory to the Director of Adoptions of the change of name;
- a photograph of you, your spouse and children;
- three letters of reference supporting your application for adoption;
- completed criminal records check for yourself, spouse and all adults living with you; completed medical forms; and prescribed fee (if appropriate).

The *Application to Adopt a Child* and *Medical Examination* forms may be obtained from your local HSS office.

Medicals

A medical exam is required of all prospective adoptive applicants. The social worker needs to know that you are healthy, have a normal life expectancy, and are able to physically and emotionally handle the care of a child.

Child Abuse and Criminal Records Check

A criminal records check and child abuse record clearance must be completed on all adoptive applicants and adults living in the home. A criminal records check involves filling out a Request for *Criminal Records* form which you obtain from your local RCMP detachment.

Your social worker at your local H&SS office will verify (through the Department) whether or not you have a child abuse record on their files.

References

You will need to name three individuals to be references for you. These might be close personal friends, an employer, a co-worker, or a neighbor. They cannot be relatives. You should select people who have known you for several years, who have visited in your home and know of your interest in children, and who are also able to comment on your lifestyle. The social worker may ask these references questions about you, such as your experience with children, your motivation to adopt and the stability of your marriage. References are used to get a complete picture of an applicant and an idea of their support network.

Adoptive Family Assessment

Once prospective adoptive parents have completed the *Application to Adopt a Child* form, and supplied all other required documentation, the application package is sent to the Director of Adoptions of the Department where it is reviewed. The Director of Adoptions will request that the Authority assign a social worker to complete the adoptive family assessment and pre-placement report.

The Adoptive Family Assessment process involves gathering information about the prospective parents and helps build a partnership between the social worker and the applicants.

The social worker meets with the applicants on several occasions, usually in the home of the applicants. If there are other people living in the home, they will also be interviewed by the social

worker. The adoptive family assessment results in a report of the findings of the social worker. This report is called a Pre-placement Report.

The Adoptions Family Assessment and Pre-placement Report process may take several weeks to complete. Some of the topics that may be discussed include:

- personal and family background-including upbringing, siblings, key events, and what was learned from them;
- significant people in the lives of the applicants; .marriage and family relationships; motivation to adopt;
- expectations for the child;
- feelings about infertility (if this is an issue);
- parenting and integration of the child into the family; .family environment;
- physical and health history of the applicants; .education, employment and finances;
- references and criminal background clearances; and summary and social worker's recommendation.

The following sections will describe typical information or activities that will be required of families who want to adopt.

During the adoption family assessment you will be asked to answer many questions such as: what was your parent's style of child rearing, how many brothers and sisters do you have, how do you currently get along with the people in your family?

There is also a section on specific adoption-related issues, including questions about why you want to adopt, what kind of child you feel you can best parent and why, and how you will handle relatives' and friends' questions about adoption.

You will be asked how you solve problems, settle arguments, communicate, and express feelings. You will also be asked to describe your ordinary routines, such as your typical weekday or weekend and your leisure time activities. There will also be questions regarding your opinions on discipline or other parenting issues.

If you have a spouse/partner, there will be questions about your relationship. These may cover how you met, how long you have been together, and what your spouse's strengths and weaknesses are.

You may not know all these answers right away! Some social workers provide applicants with a Self-Assessment for Prospective Adoptive Parents. This is a set of questions designed to help prospective adoptive parents work through some of the questions on their own time and to prepare questions of their own for the social worker.

Interviews

The social worker will conduct several interviews with you in your home and perhaps at the local HSS office. Together you will discuss a variety of topics relating to your application for adoption. If you are a couple applying to adopt, the social worker will conduct joint, as well as individual interviews.

The social worker gathers information on you and your family to ensure the child will be entering a safe and healthy environment. It is natural to be nervous but social workers know that everyone has a combination of strengths and weaknesses, which make each person unique.

During the interview, you may be asked about your income, savings, insurance policies, and debts, including your monthly mortgage or rent payment, and credit card accounts, etc. This helps determine your general financial stability. You do not have to be rich to adopt; you just have to show that you can manage your finances responsibly and adequately.

If You Already Have Children

If you already have children, they will also be included in the Adoptions Family Assessment and Pre-placement Report in some way. Children of all ages will be met by the social worker at least once. The social worker may ask the children how they see a new child fitting into the family and whether they are prepared to share you with a new sibling. Their feelings about the situation need to be considered.

For further information:

Contact your HSS Authority or visit the Department's website www.hlthss.gov.nt.ca under the Programs and Services Section.