The Rules On Foreign Adoptions

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Adopting a child from another country is a time-consuming procedure at best, and the upsurge of interest in South Vietnamese orphans will add to delays, adoption officials said yesterday.

Agencies that handle such adoptions have been flooded with inquiries during the past week, adding thousands of names to waiting lists for the children.

Here is a step-by-step outline, in general form, of the procedures involved in adoption, as outlined by Travelers Aid International Social Services of America (TAISSA):

1. Contact an agency that handles intercountry adoptions, such as TAISSA, and be put on its list of prospective adoptive parents. Only seven agencies are licensed by the South Vietnamese government, but some smaller agencies work through it in clearing a child for adoption.

2. Contact an adoption agency in your local area or the child welfare division of your state's social welfare department and file the application required under your state laws to adopt a child. Generally there will be preliminary contact with a social worker and a report to the intercountry agency.

3. If the preliminary contact is satisfactory, an appointment is made for a social worker to visit the home for a "home study," including an interview with the prospective adoptive parents. A written report is filed to the agencies involved.

4. If the home study is satisfactory, the intercountry agency and local agency work together to find a child that meets the requirement of the adoptive family.

5. The family files a petition with the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service requesting admission of the child to the United States for the purpose of later adoption. This petition must be accompanied by various documents from prospective parents, including birth certificate, marriage certificate, employment data, bankstatements or other evidence of financial circumstance.

6. Work is done to clear the child for leaving the country. In South Vietnam this normally requires clearance by three ministries and certification that the child is truly orphaned or abandoned.

7. The child is flown to the United States, usually at the parent's expense. Prospective parents also pay a fee to the agencies handling the adoption. Many agencies charge on a sliding scale depending upon the income of the parents. An average fee might be $1500.

8. After the child arrives, the parents work with the local agency to complete the legal adoption and post-placement care, and counseling is usually given by the local agency.

William Taylor, executive director of TAISSA, said the time required "could take from eight months to 1½ years depending upon circumstances" under normal conditions. "Generally it's a long, involved process," he said.