

Orphan With U.S. 'Parents' Becomes TV Star

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Kargopoltsev, center, posing with the U.S. family in Chelyabinsk in 2011. **Dianna Wallen**

A Russian teenage orphan who uses an American family's name on Facebook has become the unlikely poster boy of a Kremlin campaign to stop U.S. adoptions in Russia and to help Russian children find new homes in their own country.

After 14-year-old Maxim Kargopoltsev was reported to have written a letter to President Vladimir Putin asking for permission to be adopted by an American couple, he was shown on state television Thursday saying he had never written such a letter and wanted to stay in Russia.

He was then filmed picking out a new cell phone on a shopping trip with a member of Russia's parliament, Sergei Vainshtein, who said he was prepared to take the boy under his guardianship.

Vainshtein, who was among the parliament members who voted overwhelmingly in December for the new controversial law banning U.S. adoptions, told viewers that it was important

for Russian families to adopt more children.

State television also showed photographs of Maxim with the American couple, Dianna and Mil Wallen, of Woodstock, Virginia, who have been trying to adopt him for more than a year.

Reached by telephone, Mil Wallen said he had talked to Maxim five times that day and, although the boy was thrilled by the attention, he was still hoping to be adopted.

Wallen said he was encouraged by a statement from Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, on Thursday that an adoption deal with the U.S. will remain valid until 2014 despite the new law. Peskov later clarified that only adoptions that already have been cleared by Russian courts would be allowed to go through, but he also promised to look into why the U.S. couple hadn't been able to adopt the boy.

Since 2001, the Wallens have been doing volunteer work through their church at the orphanage where Maxim lives in Chelyabinsk, an industrial city about 1,500 kilometers east of Moscow. They met the boy six or seven years ago.

"We just fell in love with him," Wallen said. "We'd see him every year." Worried about what would become of him when he left the orphanage, they decided in November 2011 to adopt him. "We were determined that we were going to give him the life that he deserves," Wallen said.

Maxim has added the Wallen name to his on his Facebook page and identifies them as his family. Wallen confirmed that Maxim never wrote to Putin, but still hopes the publicity will help the adoption go forward.

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