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2 U.S. Adoption Agencies Closing, Citing Woes Abroad

By The Moscow Times

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NEW YORK — The lone U.S. adoption agency accredited in Kyrgyzstan is shutting down due to financial troubles, a sudden new setback for about 15 American families battling since 2008 to complete adoptions there. At the same time, another U.S. agency, which specializes in adoptions from Russia, also is closing.

"We see no other choice but to close our doors," Christian World Adoption, which handled Kyrgyz adoptions, said in an e-mail to the waiting families.

The agency, based in Fletcher, North Carolina, said an array of factors in Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere abroad had boosted its costs and cut its income to the point where it would file for bankruptcy.

Meanwhile, Adoption ARK, based in Buffalo Grove, Illinois, said it would shut down, blaming Russia's ban on adoptions by Americans. It said its program in Russia had provided more than

half its income.

The two closures highlight the challenges facing many U.S. agencies that specialize in international adoptions at a time when those are dwindling year after year. Americans adopted 8,668 foreign children in fiscal year 2012, down 62 percent from the peak of 22,884 in 2004.

Chuck Johnson, CEO of the National Council for Adoption, said he expected many more agencies to close.

For the families trying to adopt from Kyrgyzstan, most of which have spent many thousands of dollars on their quests, the sudden shutdown of Christian World Adoption came as a shock. The families said they had received no prior warnings before getting an e-mail from the agency Friday announcing that it was ending operations "effective immediately."

There was no immediate response Monday to e-mails and phone messages to agency officials seeking further comment.

A Christian World Adoption client, Shannon Fenske, of Reeseville, Wisconsin, said she and her husband, Kevin, were dismayed by the latest of many setbacks in their quest to adopt a Kyrgyz girl they were matched with in 2008.

"They did not reach out to us beforehand to allow us time to try and make any sort of arrangements," Fenske said. "They just dumped it on us on Friday afternoon and ran. We have no idea what the future holds or what our options are at this time."

But Fenske said she and her husband would not give up their efforts to adopt Kamila, who has a severe cleft lip and palate. The Fenskes, who have four other adopted children with special needs, arranged for two operations for Kamila that improved her condition, but pain and speech problems linger.

"We are fighters," Fenske said of the affected families. "This does not change the fact that our children continue to languish in institutions and that we continue to love them as much as we did yesterday."

Due mostly to corruption-related problems, Kyrgyzstan suspended foreign adoptions in 2008 and again last year after a brief resumption.

Christian World Adoption, founded in 1991, said the expense of trying to cope with these disruptions was among many factors that had depleted its financial resources. It also cited the Russian adoption ban, a continued U.S. freeze on adoptions from Cambodia and longer time frames for adopting from China and Ethiopia, the two leading countries of origin for children adopted by Americans.

The U.S. State Department, which oversees some aspects of international adoptions by Americans, said it was working to get more information about the situation in Kyrgyzstan.

The State Department also has been active in Russia trying to help U.S. families affected by the adoption ban. The ban was enacted in December as part of a package of measures retaliating against a new U.S. law allowing sanctions on Russians identified as human rights violators.

Americans have adopted thousands of Russian children over the past two decades, and the ban is already having an impact on agencies heavily involved in adoptions from there.

Last week, Adoption ARK posted a notice on its website citing the ban and the ensuing loss of revenue as the reasons for its sudden closure.

"The passage of law by both the U.S. and Russia is heartbreaking for the families who were in the process of adopting from Russia and, especially, the children who will remain in orphanages across the country, unable to grow up in the loving arms of a family," the agency said.

Adoption ARK, according to its website, was founded in 2003 and had helped place nearly 1,000 children with adoptive families.

Both Adoption ARK and Christian World Adoption were registered as nonprofit organizations.

While the closure of adoption agencies can be jarring — emotionally and financially — for their active clients, there remain enough agencies to meet the overall demand,said Kathleen Strottman, executive director of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute.

"I do not anticipate that there will ever be a day when a family is looking to hire an agency and cannot find one," she said.

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