

## SUMMER of HOPE Q & A's

### What is the SUMMER of HOPE Program?

SUMMER of HOPE is dedicated to providing the opportunity for Filipino orphanage children to:

- Experience life in a family
- Receive medical and/or dental attention
- Cultivate a lifetime connection with an American family

In addition, the program aims to build awareness of the plight of orphanage children, and to develop prospective adoptive families who are interested in adopting the children.

SUMMER of HOPE is sponsored by a non-profit organization, The Sacred Portion Children's Outreach, under the supervision of a licensed adoption agency, Associated Catholic Charities of Baltimore, Maryland.

### How does the program work?

The children travel to the U.S. accompanied by an escort from either their orphanage or another orphanage in the Philippines. Host families meet the children at the airport and take them home to live as part of their family for four weeks. While the children are in the U.S., they are expected to spend their time in the family, not in full day summer camps or day care programs. The children will participate in weekend and some weekday enrichment activities. Host families provide the opportunity to experience family life to children who would otherwise never get that chance. Secondly, other Americans get to meet the children that they have often heard about on T.V. or read about in newspapers. And third, these children find families and organizations that will provide support to them after the summer program is over, giving each participant a chance to have a more secure future. Other programs have found that many children are adopted by American families they meet during the summer program. Over the last five years, more than 1,000 children have participated in similar programs and over 90% of them found permanent families as a result of their participation.

### How are the children identified?

The Sacred Portion Children's Outreach/Catholic Charities facilitates the selection of children to participate in the Summer Program. Children are selected based on age, legal availability for adoption and recommendations by orphanage staff of children who have the potential to succeed in the program. Despite those efforts, it is impossible to predict how a child will cope in the absence of everything familiar – language, culture, caretakers, setting, food and climate. Some children do exceptionally well after a brief adjustment period, some hit the ground running and thrive on the adventure, others

struggle the entire trip and require a great deal of time and attention from the host parents. The rest fall somewhere in the middle. The Sacred Portion Children's Outreach, Catholic Charities and local resources are available to support and help you with any of the adjustment challenges.

### **How is the child matched to us?**

Although we try to honor your host child preference, the reality is that *we are looking for families for children, not children for families*. Matches will be made by The Sacred Portion Children's Outreach, subject to the approval of Catholic Charities and the Philippine Department of Social Welfare and Development.

### **Will the children be legally free for international adoption?**

The Department of Social Welfare and Development has made a commitment to referring only those children who are legally free for adoption. If you wish to adopt your host child, you must, at the conclusion of the summer program, apply to Associated Catholic Charities of Baltimore, MD or another adoption agency that is accredited to place children from the Philippines. It is up to you to move forward in a timely manner with the adoption process.

### **Who accompanies the children to the U.S.?**

Escorts, who are representatives of the children's orphanage, travel to the U.S. with the children. Their job is to make sure that the children have a safe visit and to get to know the families who may be applying to adopt them. All participating families must host one escort for a period of three to four days in their homes. This is a wonderful opportunity to get to know an adult from a different culture and create a friendship with someone who will have the ability to help the child when they return to the orphanage. The Sacred Portion Children's Outreach will provide each escort with an international phone card with a pre-determined dollar amount; the same emergency health insurance coverage as the children; a stipend for their expenses in the United States.

- Hospitality, Meals and Customs: Hospitality in the Philippines is different from American hospitality. Most escorts will wait to be asked to take some food or drink, and would not think of helping themselves. American hosts need to be sure to let their guests know that they can either help themselves to things in the refrigerator OR they need to offer meals, snacks, and beverages several times a day to their guest.
- Filipinos eat three meals per day. The largest meal is lunch. Food preferences include rice, chicken, fish and spaghetti.
- Escorts are eager to see the local sights, so each host family and other volunteers should plan on entertaining and providing culturally enriching activities for the escort during her stay. Be sure to take the time to let the escorts know what is planned for them. Ask if they have any special interests or requests as soon as they arrive.

### **What are the children told?**

Regardless of what the children are told by their escorts and orphanage staff, many long for a family and will hope that their host family will adopt them. A child may ask their host family about adoption. If this happens, families may not say that they wish to adopt the child. You may say that the adoption decision is to be made by Catholic Charities and by the Philippine Department of Social Welfare and Development. Most children are told they are coming for summer vacation and that they will stay with an American family during this time. Discussing adoption with the child or escort can result in problems and delays with foreign governments. It can also unfairly raise the hopes and expectations of a child. Even when a family intends to pursue the adoption of their host child, unforeseen circumstances may prevent the family from following through with their adoption plan.

### **What will the children do while they are here?**

In addition to participating in day to day family life, various summer camp type activities will be planned for the children during their four week stay. These activities will encompass only a few hours of the day and will not be every day of the week to allow the children plenty of time to just be at home with their host families. The summer camp activities are selected based upon the ages and interests of the children. An effort is made to provide activities that the children would not have the opportunity to do in orphanage life. We want the children's "summer vacation" to be memorable. A number of summer recreation programs in the community arrange special sessions for the Summer of Hope children, often donating or discounting the fees that would normally be charged. We feel that it is important to "share" the children with our community by allowing such organizations to provide these services. Adults are welcome to attend the summer camp activities along with their host children but their presence is not required. We do encourage host parents to volunteer some time in helping out with activities, if possible.

Host families' biological or other adopted children are welcome to participate in any of the activities that are scheduled as long as they are appropriate for the age of the child. Host families are responsible for covering the cost for their own children of any fees associated with the activities. The Sacred Portion Children's Outreach will cover the cost of fees for the Summer of Hope children. Host families will be asked to sign their children up in advance. Because the recreation programs plan for staff and materials based upon this advanced sign-up, host families are expected to follow through with the commitment of sending their children to the activities.

### **What opportunities exist for the host families to get together during the summer program?**

The Sacred Portion Children's Outreach will host a number of activities designed to bring families and children together, and to give people who are interested in meeting the children a chance to interact with the children as well. Weekly potlucks provide a setting

in which host parents can visit with each other, exchange information on how their hosting experience is going and provide support and encouragement to one another. Potlucks may also be used to generate media coverage for the children. In addition, weekend outings are planned to provide fun and recreation for the host families and their children.

### **What does The Sacred Portion Children's Outreach do?**

The Sacred Portion Children's Outreach, along with Catholic Charities, coordinates with the Department of Social Welfare and Development in the Philippines (the central government authority in the Philippines charged with the task of overseeing the welfare of abandoned and dependent children) to obtain permission for the children to come, obtain necessary background and medical information and arrange for passports, visas and travel for the children and their escorts. The Sacred Portion Children's Outreach finds host families, provides host family training and support materials, publicizes the program and creates a network of local resources for host families.

### **What kind of volunteers are needed?**

In addition to host families, volunteers are needed in a variety of areas. We encourage host families to recruit volunteers from among their family and friends, and also to participate in some of the volunteer activities.

- Publicists: Volunteers in the community to get the word out – from putting flyers in grocery stores to speaking to community groups and churches.
- Fundraisers: Volunteers to solicit monetary, merchandise, or service donations from churches, civic groups, museums, medical providers, etc. Host families are asked to help The Sacred Portion Children's Outreach raise the funds necessary to bring the identified group of children to our community by getting involved in any large or small-scale fund raising events that SPCO has arranged.
- Event Coordinators: Volunteers to help organize and run events, including those that will give these children exposure to the maximum number of families.

### **What kind of training and support will the host families receive?**

- Families will be required to meet with a licensed social worker and to undergo criminal and child abuse record checks.
- Before the child comes, the family will be required to attend an orientation and 10 hour training session where they can learn about the experiences of post-institutionalized children and issues that they may face when hosting. They will also meet professionals who work with post-institutionalized children.

- Families will be given a Profile of the Older Post-Institutionalized Child, a Child Talk language guide, and a recommended reading list so they become educated and well-informed.
- While the children are here, the families will meet with social workers once each week, to discuss the family and child's adjustment and concerns.

**Aside from providing a home to a child for four weeks, what else will be expected of me?**

Host families are expected to involve the children in an active, structured, nurturing environment and to provide them with their basic necessities while they are here. The children will likely arrive with only one change of clothing and host families will need to provide additional clothing during the child's stay. Families can be expected to spend anywhere from \$100 to \$200 for clothing. This is determined by whether you purchase new or used clothing. This expense can be reduced by using clothing your other children have outgrown or by collecting donations of clothing from family and friends.

Each child will be covered by a major medical insurance policy during their stay, but minor medical care or visits to pediatricians will be the responsibility of the host family. This policy is for emergencies and accidents. It does not cover preventive services or pre-existing conditions, nor are dental and vision care included. Emergency room charges are not covered unless the child is directly admitted to the hospital as an inpatient, or in the case of emergency treatment of an injury. Any elective evaluations or assessments are at the host family's expense. No invasive medical procedures can be done without permission of The Sacred Portion Children's Outreach and Catholic Charities. Because children residing in orphanages often have limited medical care, host families are encouraged take advantage of medical services that are donated by the community for the summer program. These include a general physical exam, dental exam, vision and hearing screening.

Families must attend weekly events that bring all families and children together, and give other families an opportunity to interact with the children. Host families are expected to advocate for their host children.

Families are required to sign an agreement saying they will send the child back to the orphanage at the end of the four week summer program. All children must return to their orphanages at the end of the program.

**What is my/our role as an advocate?**

Your primary and most vital role in the program is as an advocate for your host child with the goal of finding a permanent family. The opportunity to come to the United States is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for these children. This means that you and your community will create opportunities for your child to meet as many potential families as possible throughout their stay. It is not our intention to traumatize and confuse the children and disrupt your lives, but it is our intention to expose the children to as many

prospective families as possible. Many of our host families will participate in the program with the hope and expectation of meeting a child and moving on to adoption. You may find, in the midst of your hosting experience, that adopting an older child is not for you. Or perhaps, your particular host child is not right for your family or their needs are greater than you feel you can manage. Please keep in mind that through the efforts you and your community have made to bring them here, and in opening your home and family to host, you have already given them a monumental gift. If it is not meant to be for your family, then remain focused on advocating for your host child by providing them with opportunities to meet other potential families. Let that be another gift – and your most critical obligation during the program.

Some of you may be overwhelmed by the hosting experience and/or the needs of your child and may find yourselves stuck, unable to move in any direction. A social worker will be available to address any questions or concerns you may have regarding your child, adjustment issues, typical behaviors or post adoption challenges. There will be no pressure to adopt, but there will be pressure to focus your attention on your host child's needs, and be open to supporting and participating in advocating for their future even as you consider adoption yourselves.

### **What if host families find they are not able to keep the child for the full four weeks?**

Sometimes unexpected things happen within a family that will prohibit them from continuing to host a child for the full length of their stay. Although The Sacred Portion Children's Outreach does not want to move children from home to home, a poor match or a safety issue may necessitate a child's removal from their host home and placement into another family.

### **Do host families have to speak the child's language?**

Surprisingly, the language barrier is not a critical problem. The children learn English quickly, and rapidly pick up household words.

### **What happens to the kids at the end of the summer program?**

After the four week visit, the children must return home to their orphanages with their escorts.

### **What if a family decides to adopt?**

If a family decides they would like to adopt a child they have met through the summer program, that family must inform The Sacred Portion Children's Outreach of their decision. Even if the family has decided to adopt the child, the child must still return to the Philippines at the end of the summer program. The family must go through the adoption process following the requirements of the Philippines and be approved as an adoptive family. It will take approximately 6-9 months for the adoption process to be completed after which the family can travel to the Philippines to pick up their child.

### **Special Circumstances:**

Individuals whose circumstances include the following may not be eligible to host:

- History of drug or alcohol abuse/DWI/DUI
- Criminal history
- History of domestic violence
- Perpetrator of child abuse or neglect
- Psychiatric hospitalization/suicidal history
- Psychotropic medication
- Disrupted adoption
- Subject of a previous unfavorable home study
- Any health conditions that could adversely impact your ability to parent

The day the children arrive is a very exciting day! Please remember that they have traveled for over 24 hours prior to their arrival. Most are excited and happy, eager to meet their families and go off to their home for the summer. Some may be exhausted or frightened or overwhelmed and need some coaxing and reassurance before leaving with you. Try not to be discouraged or disappointed in a child who may take more time and patience to settle in and feel secure.