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Russian woman finds career bringing families together through adoption

Published: Tuesday, March 15, 2011, 6:18 AM

By Myron Kukla | The Grand Rapids Press

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JENISON — Siberian-born Alla (Goncharova) Dickson found her calling as an adoption specialist in 1994 when she acted as a translator for a Michigan family seeking to adopt a Russian orphan.

“God led me to a life of helping families and children come together,” said Dickson, 50. She’s the adoption coordinator with Adoption Associates of Jenison and head of its Russian adoption program.

Dickson works with 80 to 100 clients a year on domestic and international adoptions.

“Each family is special, each child is special,” said Dickson of the 18- to 30-month process of bringing families and children together.

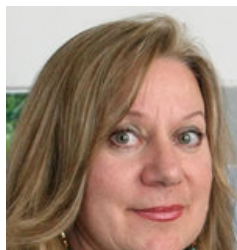
With a master’s in art, language and literature from the Soviet Union College, Dickson came to West Michigan with the help of one of the first adoption families she worked with. Adoption Associates helped her get a green card, open a bank account, learn to drive and start to find a home.

Since then she has been a fixture with the agency, using her knowledge of the language, Russian adoption processes and court systems to bring



Amanda Loman | The Grand Rapids Press

New son: Lisa and Jackson Fox adopted Danya, 10, center, from Russia two years ago. The Foxes, who have two biological children, Isaiah, 13, left, and Joslyn, 11, wanted to adopt from Russia after hosting a student from Belarus.



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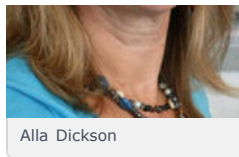
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together more than 900 children over the years.

After a Tennessee woman put her adopted child on a plane by himself with a note to be shipped him back to Russia last year, adoptions from Russia actually increased, said Adoption Associates Executive Director Jane Bareman.



Alla Dickson

"That was an isolated event in the world of adoption. That just should never happen," she said.

After hosting a Russian child for a summer program three years ago through Adoption Associates Host of Hopes program, Lisa and Jackson Fox, of Grand Rapids, decided they wanted to add to their family that includes two biological children Joslyn, 11, and Isaiah, 13. In 2009, they adopted then 8-year-old Daniil, a Russian orphan boy they named Danya.

The Foxes made two trips to Russia to meet Danya. In February 2009 — after 25 days in Russia — they brought him to Grand Rapids.

A bright 10-year-old, Danya is a fourth grader in Grand Rapids schools. His favorite subject is math, and he is active in soccer and hockey. While they had prepared for Danya's adoption and knew what to expect, there were adjustments in the Fox household.

Fox says adoption can be challenging and frustrating.

"The child has to go through a grief process when adopted, grief over the loss of what they knew, their language, their culture everything they knew and were attached — even the smells — is gone and changed," she said.

Adopted children, like biological children, also test parents.

"They do things that are intended to test the boundaries of your love. 'If I do this will you still love me? What about now? And now?'" Fox explained.

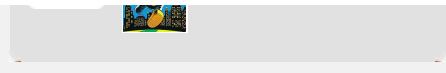
The Foxes have gotten to know Russian culture and traditions. "We make different Russian foods like Borsht, beef stroganoff and pierogies and celebrate Russian (Eastern Orthodox) Christmas," Fox said.

E-mail the author of this story: yourlife@grpress.com

IF YOU GO

Adoption resources in West Michigan

- Adoptive Parent Support Group — Kent County, 866-968-7411.
- Adoptive Family Support Network Grand Rapids, post-adoption organization, 458-7945, afsn.org.
- Chinese Culture Group of Greater Grand Rapids: educational/cultural group, (pre- and post-adoption), ccgggr.org.
- Christian Advocates For Adoption, 669-0655, cafadopt.org.
- Families For International Children, links adoptive families through educational and social activities, fficgr.org.
- Adoption Associates Inc., adoptionassociates.net
- Michigan Association of Single Adoptive Parents, pages.ivilage.com/masap.
- Ottawa Area Adoption Consortium, parent support group for challenging, adopted children ages 2-12, contact Bettye Jo Bell, bjbell@tds.net, 355-7720
- Redeeming Hearts: post-adoption support/prayer ministry, redeeminghearts.info



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