



From WACAP's Board Chair, Janna Annest

Dear Families and Friends of WACAP,

I joined WACAP's Board of Directors in 2014. As an adoptive parent and an adoption attorney, its mission was already close to my heart, and five years later it has only grown closer.

But as my admiration for WACAP has grown in that time, so have the challenges facing intercountry adoption. By now, most people know that the number of children adopted from other countries declined precipitously since 2004, when 22,989 children came home to families in the United States. In 2017, that number was only 4714. The reasons for the decline are both simple and complicated, and we have no reason to believe this trend will change. That is a tragedy.

As the number of children made available for international adoption contracted, the U.S. Department of State ramped up its oversight and regulation of adoption agencies. Oversight is not a bad thing, but the costs of demonstrating compliance are high and still climbing. Unsurprisingly, these conditions forced 30 Intercountry adoption agencies to close or relinquish their accreditation since April 2017. Experts forecast that within a few years, only about 3,000 adoptees will come home to families in the United States each year, and their adoptions will be handled by a small number of large agencies.

WACAP has always set the standard for ethical adoption work. Due to our already-excellent practices, WACAP met and exceeded these more rigorous requirements when other agencies could not. Likewise, the extraordinary skill and dedication of our staff enabled us to become more efficient. We redoubled our development and philanthropy efforts, expanded our social media presence, and diversified our programs – with a particular focus on expanding our fast-growing U.S. kids program. We kept finding families for kids and bringing them home.

But by 2018, it was apparent that these efforts could not offset the external forces working against intercountry adoption. With so few children available for placement, WACAP's historical business model was simply no longer viable. The Board of Directors needed to choose a different course for WACAP's future while we still had the time and resources to make a choice.

How could we advance WACAP's mission of being a champion for children, finding and preparing permanent families, and offering lifelong support after adoption in this situation? Our volunteer Board devoted hundreds upon hundreds of hours to answering this question. Our work this year was far outside the ordinary course of business, and the consequences of our decisions weighed heavily on us. They still do.

The choice was crystal clear. Merging with Holt International was the best way continue WACAP's mission of serving children and families. Holt's long-term prospects for continuing intercountry adoption work are strong. By transitioning the majority of WACAP's intercountry programs to Holt, we will preserve the relationships and expertise built by WACAP staff over 40 years and ensure their long-term survival.

Simultaneously, we will gain the resources necessary to grow our work with kids in U.S. foster care. While intercountry adoptions were in decline, the need for foster parents has grown to a crisis level. Holt enthusiastically supports our plans to expand services to U.S. kids, and our Renton office will be the hub of innovative, desperately-needed programs to assist children in need of foster families and permanent homes. That vision absolutely lights us up.

So, right next to the sadness and anxiety we have felt over the past year, there is a growing spark of excitement for the future. We are simultaneously grieving and hopeful. Above all, I am grateful for the absolute certainty that we will still be champions for children, finding families and providing lifelong support. That is our mission, and it continues. Come with us.

Janna