



The Adoption Process in Belize

Family Connections, Inc will commit to you that we will partner with you throughout this process in order to keep you up to date and informed during every step of this process. We also want you to do your part by reading the information we provide to you so you may be informed. Changes occur sometimes daily in international adoption. Each page, each email and each phone call of information is important and we need that commitment from your family too that you will read, save and notate changes and information given to you as your adoption progresses.



The process is fairly simple, though there are always delays by the Belizean government in processing the case. From the time your Dossier arrives in country, the estimated timeline is 1 to 3 years for a referral although the time can vary. If you are requesting a more specific or narrowly defined referral situation, the wait time may increase. The following is a basic summary of the process:

Preparing Your Dossier Packet

FAMILY CONNECTIONS, INC. will conduct the home studies for all families living in the state of New York who are contracting with us for their adoption. If you live outside the state of New York please contact your coordinator before choosing a home study agency.

Your Dossier will be prepared per Belizean guidelines by our Dossier Specialist. FAMILY CONNECTIONS, INC. will then review all documents together as a package, not by piece. The dossier specialist will make recommendations for you on corrections of the dossier, notary and other added information checked carefully before sending for apostille. All documents must be apostilled in the state in which they originate or are notarized.

ALL DOCUMENTS MUST BE SENT TO FAMILY CONNECTIONS, INC. VIA FEDEX OR TRACKABLE SERVICE!!

How your Dossier is Processed

Once we receive the Dossier we check it for accuracy twice. We often have to walk away and have a break, we start seeing stars, and seals and stamps and...you get the picture! We may have you change a document. Please know that this will be necessary to make the process for you smoother, and it is not uncommon to have to re-do a document. Please review the changes and work on them quickly. Do not let time pass or it could take a huge amount of time to get through the dossier.

Translation

The dossier will be sent in English, and no translation will be needed unless there are documents associated with the Belizean side that are not in English.

Submitting Dossier to Officials for Adoption Approval

The Attorney in Belize will submit your dossier to the Department of Human Services for registration. At this time, your case is in the hands of the DHS for review and referral. At some point, your family will be approved by the department for adoption.

Referral

Once your dossier is registered with the DHS you will wait for a referral. The timeframe between dossier submission to the DHS and referral is approximately 1 to 3 years. The matching is being done mainly based on the Homestudy issued by a relevant authority or accredited organization of a country that has ratified the Hague Convention.

Because Belize is party to the Hague Adoption Convention, children from Belize must meet the requirements of the Convention in order to be eligible for intercountry adoption. For example, the adoption may take place only if the competent authorities of Belize have determined that placement of the child within Belize has been given due consideration and that an intercountry adoption is in the child's best interests.

Belizean law only allows for the adoption of children who are citizens of Belize. A child who is not a Belizean citizen cannot be the subject of an adoption in a Belizean court, although Belizean courts can issue custody orders for any child residing in Belize.

The DHS is responsible for all of the child's process and the family cannot be a part of this, nor communicate with DHS or cause communication with DHS through another party. This process cannot be hurried or expedited. Investigations and reports on the child must happen.

DHS then matches you with a child and sends a report on the child's medical and social history called an Article 16 report.

The Article 16 report also establishes that the competent authorities have, as required under Article 4 of the Convention:

- Established that the child is eligible for adoption;
- Determined, after having given due consideration to the possibility of placing the child for adoption within the Convention country, that intercountry adoption is in the child's best interests;
- Ensured that the legal custodian, after having been counseled as required concerning the effect of the child's adoption on the legal custodian's relationship to the child and on the child's legal relationship to his or her family of origin, has freely consented in writing to the child's adoption, in the required legal form;
- Ensured that if any individual or entity other than the legal custodian must consent to the child's adoption, this individual or entity, after having been counseled as required concerning the effect of the child's adoption, has freely consented in writing, in the required legal form, to the child's adoption;
- Ensured that the child, after having been counseled as appropriate concerning the effects of the adoption, has freely consented in writing, in the required legal form, to the adoption, if the child is of an age that, under the law of the country of the child's habitual residence, makes the child's consent necessary, and that consideration was given to the child's wishes and opinions; and
- Ensured that no payment or inducement of any kind has been given to obtain the consents necessary for the adoption to be completed.

You should receive a photo and brief medical and social history. The quality and quantity of information we will receive will vary from child to child. You will have at least 2 weeks to decide on this referral. If you accept the referral, the attorney will begin to prepare court papers and will send to Family Connections, Inc and you will have some additional documentation to sign and apostille for the attorney.

If the referral is declined the adoptive family will be required to complete a letter to the DHS stating their intent to decline the referral and the reason for declining. The dossier will be re-entered into the queue for consideration of another referral.

Occasionally families will have identified children as in the case of Relative Adoptions. It will be up to the Department of Human Services to see if these children indeed are available for international adoption. This process could become lengthy.

Family Connections, Inc cannot ask about children available for adoption until your USCIS is approved and your dossier is submitted.

Processing of the I800 through the embassy

After accepting a referral, FAMILY CONNECTIONS, INC. will assist you to fill out the paperwork needed so you can get approval at the embassy after you have accepted the referral. The embassy process is also slow, so patience is needed.

The attorney in Belize will send Family Connections, Inc paperwork that will need to be signed for court. Your family cannot sign these until the Embassy issues a document called the Article 5 Letter. Once the embassy has issued this letter, they will contact the attorney in Belize to come pick up the letter. The attorney will pick up the letter and take to the Department. Once you sign the additional needed documents and update dossier documents that have expired, with apostilles, FAMILY CONNECTIONS, INC. will forward the documents to your attorney.

Only after all of this is completed, DHS will also be recommending that you begin contact with the child through packages, letters, phone calls, skype calls or a visit. All contact with the orphanage, foster home or children's home must come through FAMILY CONNECTIONS, INC. prior to travel. All contact ALWAYS with the Department of Human Services must be done through FAMILY CONNECTIONS, INC. and/or your attorney in Belize. You cannot be in contact with anyone prior to approval of such contact. These are the Hague Standards that you must follow. Not following these standards can jeopardize your adoption process.

Court

The process for finalizing the adoption or obtaining legal custody for purposes of emigration and adoption in Belize generally includes the following:

- **Role of Adoption Authority:** The Belize Central Authority (Belize Department of Human Services) processes the adoption application and upon approval forwards the dossier to the Supreme Court of Belize.
- **Role of the Court:** The Supreme Court of Belize determines the adoptability of a child, and issues the final adoption decree. Upon any application for an adoption order, the Supreme Court of Belize will usually postpone the determination of the application and instead issue a provisional adoption order giving custody of the child to the applicant for a probationary period that is typically one year and does not exceed two years. The court may include in the provisional adoption order provisions for the maintenance, education, and supervision of the welfare of the child specified as it deems fit.

All consents required for a final adoption order are also required for an provisional adoption order.

When a provisional adoption order is issued, the prospective adoptive parent(s) will have custody of the child for a probationary period, usually one year, during which there must be quarterly reports regarding the child's care and progress. Prospective adoptive parents who receive a provisional order from the Supreme Court of Belize, and would like to complete the adoption in the United States, may seek an IH-4 visa for the child after issuance of the provisional adoption order. This visa requires that the prospective adoptive parents understand and agree that they will seek a final adoption decree from their state of legal residence after completion of the probationary period. Even though the child will be living in the United States, the Supreme Court of Belize may request home study reports from the adoption service provider and/or U.S. social services agencies during the probationary period.

Prospective adoptive parents may also complete the probationary period in Belize. In this case, prospective adoptive parents would obtain a final adoption decree from the Supreme Court of Belize after fulfilling the one year period and apply to the U.S. Embassy for an IH-3 immigrant visa for the child after issuance of the final adoption decree.

All consents required for a full and final adoption order are also required for an interim adoption order. Under Belizean law, consents provided by birth parents or legal guardians of the child become irrevocable upon issuance of a provisional adoption order. However, once entered with the court, the consents by the parent or legal custodian are not revocable by the parent or guardian themselves, but are only revocable by court action.

According to sections 137 and 141 of Belizean adoption law, the Supreme Court of Belize may (and usually does) postpone the granting of a final adoption decree and instead issues an interim or provisional

adoption order. Under this circumstance, the prospective adoptive parent(s) will have custody of the child for a probationary period of one year (in the US) during which there must be quarterly reports regarding the child's care and progress. Prospective parents who receive an interim order from the Supreme Court of Belize and would like to carry it out in the U.S. may seek an IH-4 visa for the child. This visa is granted to the prospective parents only with the understanding and agreement that they will also seek a final adoption decree from their state of legal residence, and subsequently US Citizenship for the child. Even though the child will be living in the U.S., the Supreme Court of Belize will request four home study reports from U.S. Social Services agencies during the interim.

Prospective adoptive parents may fulfill the interim one year probationary period in Belize. In this case prospective adoptive parents would obtain a final adoption decree from the Supreme Court of Belize after fulfilling the one year period and would then apply to the U.S. Embassy for an IH-3 immigrant visa for the child.

The court process should take around 4 months after documentation is in order. Delays should be expected getting the court documentation in place. Again patience will be required.

Time Frame for Adoption Processing

The processing time for adoptions can vary, depending on the circumstances of the case. The Belize Department of Human Services reports that "*ward adoptions*" (children in the custody of the Department of Human Services) can take up to one year or more to process because of the need for home study reports, matching, placement and legal proceedings. If the prospective adoptive parents request a specific child, the matching and placement determination can take less time if it is a relative.

Travel

You will have travel calls that will prepare you for the entire pick-up trip. After the adoption has been processed and documents for the embassy are in place, DHS will notify Family Connections, Inc about a travel date for custody and the family will travel. The passport will be issued for the child through the DHS and you will file for an appointment (DS-260) with the US embassy for the Embassy Visa Visit. Do not book your travel without talking to the FAMILY CONNECTIONS, INC. travel coordinator. If you go too soon to Belize, you may need to return back without the children.

You will visit the embassy after the Embassy approved medical clinic visit with your child. This trip could take up to 6 weeks to accomplish, depending on all the entities that need to get procedures accomplished. Expect that the medical could take up to a week to get appointment and testing. Please talk to your travel coordinator about any vaccination waivers that can be done for the child in Belize and in the US.

The child will travel home on the Belizean passport which bears the Belizean name that the child has currently.

Post Adoption Requirements

Once you are home with your child, Family Connections, Inc will send you a Post Adoption Packet and you will be assigned a Post Adoption Coordinator. You will begin your required post adoption reporting.

Under Belizean law, there must be quarterly reports done for 12 months regarding the process of the child; such reports must be submitted to the court in Belize. After the twelve month period, an application will be made to a designated court for the adoption to be made final. Paperwork will again be sent to FAMILY CONNECTIONS, INC. and then to your family.

Your family will need to do the adoption finalization steps after the Post Adoption Requirements are completed and after the Belize Finalization Court. During this time in the US court procedure your family can change the child's name.

You will finalize the adoption in the US, change the child's name, obtain US birth certificate, change the Social Security status of your child and you will apply for citizenship of your child. You will receive an adoption certificate from Belize in which to begin the process of adoption finalization in your state. After this process is when your child can take on your last name and finally get their US passport.

Your case cannot be closed with FAMILY CONNECTIONS, INC. until all of these steps have happened. Please be aware of the post adoption contract you have signed with Family Connections, Inc as you are obligated to fulfill these requirements.

Closing your adoption case

You will need to send all the adoption finalization paperwork to FAMILY CONNECTIONS, INC. including the Certificate of Citizenship. FAMILY CONNECTIONS, INC. will close your adoption case and the process will then be finally completed.