

# UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH



## **Intervention in Russian Orphanage Improves Children's Development**

The University of Pittsburgh, in collaboration with IAG and IAG families and with the support of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, improved caregiving quality in an orphanage in St. Petersburg, Russia by placing children in smaller groups, having them stay with the same few caregivers, and training caregivers to provide warm, responsive care. Children who received higher caregiving quality demonstrated improved cognitive, social, language, and motor development. Although at first caregivers in the orphanage resisted changing their habits, they reported feeling more rewarded by their jobs after these changes were made. These changes are being maintained by the orphanage without additional cost or effort, and similar improvements are now being made to orphanages in other countries. For more details and information about this project, please see the Office of Child Development on the web: <http://www.education.pitt.edu/ocd/>.

## **Healthy Childhood Development Following Adoption**

Adoption is a life-changing experience for children. Numerous studies document the better health and development of adopted children relative to those who remain in orphanages and other placements. In addition, research findings consistently show that children adopted from orphanages demonstrate remarkable developmental catch-up once placed in families. Their physical growth, motor skills, language ability, and social development all improve tremendously after receiving the nurture and support that a family provides.

As is the case for all children, it is important to monitor the health and development of children adopted internationally from orphanages and other care arrangements. This can facilitate the provision of appropriate services for children who take longer to adjust to their new homes and prepare adoptive parents and the wider community to provide a supportive environment. Studies by IAG and the University of Pittsburgh made possible with the support and participation of IAG families have found that:

- While most children adopted internationally from orphanages and other settings do not have significant social, emotional, behavioral, or language problems, some children may display the following difficulties:
  - Attention problems include difficulty sustaining attention, ignoring distractions, and inhibiting automatic responses while pursuing longer-term goals. These difficulties can influence academic performance and peer interactions. Effective academic support services include adjusting classroom structure and instruction by repeating new information, supplementing verbal instructions with visual aids, and breaking down multi-step projects into smaller steps.

- Difficulty with spoken or written language includes specific learning disabilities such as those involving reading, writing, or spelling. Specific instructional support, such as speech therapy, can improve performance on a wide range of academic tasks that involve the integration of multiple skills.
- Social difficulties include difficulties with interactions and relationships with peers and adults. Difficulties picking up cues from others and knowing how to approach peer interactions can be addressed through services, including social skills training and involvement in structured, supervised activities with peers.
- Children adopted from severely depriving orphanages that failed to provide adequate food, clothing, and medical care are at greater risk of developmental difficulties growing up. (Thankfully, these orphanages are relatively rare, the most notable example from the past being the Romanian orphanages of the 1990s).
- Adolescence can be a challenging age for all children, including those adopted internationally from orphanages and other care settings. Some adopted adolescents may exhibit social and behavioral difficulties that require additional support in the form of increased parental monitoring, mentoring, social skills training, or counseling services.