

Consider a Gift to our Research Fund

The Child Emotion Research Lab, which houses the Wisconsin International Adoption Project, has established a fund for tax deductible contributions. We welcome contributions from individuals, families, small businesses, and corporations. All of the money received is used to support our research. Contributions may be made by clipping this coupon and mailing it to: University of Wisconsin Foundation, US Bank Lockbox, PO Box 78807, Milwaukee, WI 53278-0807. What a great way to honor birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays!

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Inside the Wisconsin International Adoption Project



Summer 2008

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Greetings from Dr. Pollak and Barb Roeber

Dear Parents,

We are pleased to provide you with another newsletter, highlighting some of the research that we have been conducting. Our team has made great progress with our studies of children who joined their families through international adoption. Many new studies have been completed and we are now devoting ourselves to analyzing data that we collected. We hope to publish and disseminate the results of these studies in the next few months. Our deepest thanks to all of you who were able to help us by participating in our studies during the past two years.

A warm thank you also to those families who were able to contribute to our lab fund through the University of Wisconsin Foundation. Your tax deductible contributions allow us to respond to research needs quickly and creatively without the restrictions that come with our federal monies. Our lab fund is a great way for you to honor birthdays, anniversaries, and other special occasions - such as the day your child arrived home! You can read more about our lab fund on the back of this newsletter.

We look forward to seeing many of you again this year as our studies continue. Please be in touch with us if you have questions or ideas for us.

Dr. Seth Pollak, Director,
WI International Adoption Project

Barb Roeber, Community Outreach Coordinator
WI International Adoption Project

New Study on Children's Learning

By Dr. Seth Pollak



Over the past few years, many families have encouraged us to undertake studies that might address some of the challenges that many post-institutionalized children are encountering in school. We are delighted to report that we have completed such a study and that the paper will be appearing in a special issue of the journal *Child Development*. This special issue will focus on the effects of early experiences on children's cognitive and social development. The journal is the official publication of the Society for Research in Child Development (www.srcd.org), one of the oldest and largest professional societies focused on children's development in the world.

Our study involved 132 8- and 9-year-old children and took two full years to complete. We conducted the study in collaboration with our colleagues at the Minnesota International Adoption Pro-

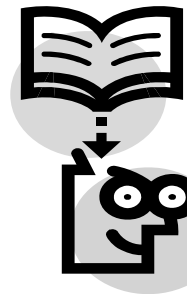
Children's Learning—continued

ject. The primary goal of this study was to determine which—if any—cognitive processes that might influence children's school-based learning may have been affected by life in an orphanage abroad before joining their families in the U.S. The study included children who were adopted at 12 months of age or older. Over 50% of this group had no experience other than institutional care prior to adoption.

Nineteen of these children were adopted from Asia, eleven from Latin America, twenty-seven from Russia or other Eastern European countries, and one from Africa. We compared the children who spent the first years of their lives in orphanages with two other groups of children. One comparison group consisted of children born and raised in their birth families in the U.S. The second comparison group was children who were adopted internationally, but predominantly from foster care prior to eight months of age. These children came almost exclusively from Asia and Latin America. There were no differences between the three groups of children in terms of the numbers of boys versus girls, the age of the children, or the level of parent education. On average, adoptive parents had higher family incomes than those of other families.

We observed that on a majority of tasks, post-institutionalized children displayed *performance equivalent to their peers*. There were, however, three areas where the post-institutionalized children did appear to have difficulties. One of these potential problem areas involved tests where children had to pay attention to visual information and also to remember visual information. These are tasks similar to what a child would have to do when a teacher is writing information on a blackboard. We found that the post-institutionalized children had more difficulty learning this type of information. We also found that many of the post-institutionalized children had trouble with a process called "inhibitory control." Inhibitory control refers to the processes that allow us to control behavior—such as remembering to raise one's hand in class before speaking, or deciding not to say something when angry. What is especially curious and potentially important is that these same children performed well—exactly at age-appropriate levels—when auditory or verbal information was involved. In other words, when there was information to listen to, rather than only see, the children were in fact able to pay attention well and remember the information that they heard.

We will need to conduct further research to better understand why post-institutionalized children perform better on tasks that rely primarily on auditory, as compared with visual, information. One possibility is that visual development is more vulnerable to post-natal influences. The auditory system starts functioning during the last trimester of gestation whereas the visual system does not start functioning until after birth. Thus, auditory experience starts before visual experience, when the brain is at a



different point in its development. Unfortunately, many orphanages do not provide infants with many rich and compelling visual experiences that might help foster visual skill development. In the meantime, we anticipate that studies such as this one can help guide educators and parents as they develop strategies to help each child reach his or her full potential.

Questions and Answers about WIAP

We thought this newsletter would be a good place to answer some of your questions. If you have a question that you would like to see addressed in this newsletter, please email it to Barb Roeber, our Community Outreach Coordinator, at roeber@waisman.wisc.edu. We will try to answer questions from our readers in every issue.

Question:

When and where will I be able to learn about the results of your recent studies?

Answer:

We have data from several studies currently being analyzed. Following the analysis, scientific papers will be written and submitted for review. This means that scientific journals will take our data and send it to independent scientists for verification. This process helps to ensure that we have not made any errors in our procedures, analyses, or interpretations. While this process is time consuming, it is also extremely important. Once our papers are published, we will post them on our web site under "Current Research: Publications" and notify families through this newsletter.

Children's Hospital of Wisconsin-International Adoption Clinic

by Liz Schaefer MSW

The International Adoption Clinic at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin aims to be a unique resource for families who are adopting children from international settings, many of whom may have medical or developmental needs. Only a few such programs are offered throughout the country and no other exists in Wisconsin. We offer three services for families:

I. Pre-adoption Medical Record Review -

A physician or certified pediatric nurse practitioner in our clinic is available to review medical records, photos, videos and other health care history or information on children currently living overseas. A physician or certified pediatric nurse practitioner will call families within one to three business days with his or her assessment of the child's developmental level, general health and any obvious health care needs. Longer turnaround times are possible, depending on volume and physician availability, but we will do our best to respond in a timely manner.

II. Arrival Medical Evaluation -

Once the adoption has taken place and the child/children arrive in their new home, families can make a clinic appointment to meet with a team of specialists at Children's Hospital.

The staff will meet with the family and child and discuss the child's health care needs and decide on a plan of care. After the clinic visit, the family and the child's primary care physician will receive a summary of the visit and any follow-up recommendations.

III. Post-adoption physical and follow-up -

Once beyond the excitement of the initial phase of adoption, children and their new families begin the process of establishing their new life together. For most children, this involves learning and adapting to a myriad of new experiences. Supporting children and families through this critical and exciting time is a major goal of the program. Follow-up visits over the first year of adoption are encouraged, and developmental assessment of child becomes the main focus of the visits.

Evaluation also is available of older children who were adopted from international settings if there is a concern about a health, behavioral or developmental problem relating to the adoption process.

If you would like more information about the services offered please contact Liz Schaefer, MSW, International Adoption Clinic Social Worker for more details at 414-266-2945 or via e-mail eschaefer@chw.org.

Ways You Can Become Involved in New Research Projects

- It is important that we continue to connect with families who might be interested in joining the registry to help us with future studies. If you know a family who has yet to join the registry or who perhaps has just welcomed a child into their family, we would appreciate you making them aware of our registry.
- Currently, we have several studies running which are follow-up studies and involve children who participated in a specific previous study. Very exciting!
- Please pass this newsletter along to neighbors and friends to help us spread the word about the Wisconsin International Adoption Project.

There are a number of ways you can become involved in our research at the WIAP.