

FAMILY ROUTES

A Quarterly Newsletter by International Social Service-USA

“HOME” IS WITH FAMILY



Since August 14, 2021, when mass evacuations began, the U.S. has helped evacuate approximately 116,700 people out of Afghanistan, according to figures from the White House as of August 30, 2021, about 122,300 people have been evacuated since the end of July, including about 5,500 U.S. citizens and their families.

Since the start of the mass evacuation, ISS-USA has been hard at work providing support, training and technical assistance to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Human Service Emergency Preparedness and Response (OHSEPR). ISS-USA Repatriation team members quickly set up two 1-800 phone lines and a designated email address so that all HHS and local emergency center responders based at airports could get immediate answers to their questions in real time while meeting and greeting all those arriving from Afghanistan. In some cases, we helped responders to provide immediate assistance by arranging services as people were entering.

Upon notice of being on standby, ISS-USA made arrangements, at OHSEPR's request, to translate an explanation of how the U.S. Repatriation program provides assistance to eligible repatriates in the form of a loan into Pashto and Dari. DOS and HHS made sure that people returning had access to U.S. Repatriation Program information. The translations were quickly and expertly completed by Compass translators, <https://www.thecenterutica.org/our-services/translation/> where ISS-USA's executive director used to work many years ago, overseeing the provision of interpretation/translation, English language classes, immigration assistance, employment services and community awareness and cultural competence training to refugees and immigrants in Utica, NY.

ISS-USA repatriation team members provided 24/7 support helping eligible repatriates complete forms to enroll to receive U.S. repatriation assistance, brainstorm with HHS when newly arriving families needed immediate assistance finding places to stay, booking onward transportation and other services such as medical care. **An ISS-USA team member helped a husband connect with his pregnant wife and young children to safely give birth upon reunification with her family.** The entire family, though enduring a great deal of stress, is doing well, the baby is healthy, and Mom and newborn are now receiving appropriate medical care. While most families who are eligible for U.S. Repatriation program assistance are able to arrange for transportation, housing and other services on their own, or with help from family, friends or community members, ISS-USA continues to receive referrals for services as well as questions about eligibility and how to enroll.

The U.S. repatriation program typically provides assistance to approximately 700 returning eligible Americans each year in the form of a loan. All those enrolled in the program are U.S. Citizens or dependents on a U.S. citizen, are destitute, have complex mental health or medical issues, or are children returning on their own, unaccompanied. In the past 18 months, ISS-USA has supported OHSEPR during three major emergency repatriations, from Wuhan and then from around the globe when the pandemic first broke out, from Myanmar, and currently from Afghanistan.

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ISS-USA...THE BEST JOB I HAVE EVER HAD...



Joan Rappleyea
Worked for ISS-USA from 1965-1969
and 1973-1976

One never knows who one will meet at lunch.

Allison Blake, ISS-USA Board Member, former Commissioner for the New Jersey Department of Children and Families and currently CEO of Child and Family Agency of SE CT sat down for lunch at a local community organization in Madison, Connecticut and started chatting with the woman on her left. To her surprise, she too was also a social worker, an alum of the very same place where Allison had earned her PhD in social work, and most intriguing of all, Joan talked about the “best social work job she had ever had,” which happened to be where Allison was serving on the board of directors, recently elected to serve as the Vice Chair.

“Working at ISS was the best job I have ever had”

Joan Rappleyea graduated from Fordham University with a Master’s in Social Work in 1964. She was granted a scholarship to attend Fordham from Catholic Charities, and so upon completion of her degree, she went to work as a social worker at a Catholic Charities foster care program. While Joan learned a lot about foster care, she, like those who have come both before and after her at ISS, had a thirst to put her social work degree to work in a larger context. So, in 1965, Joan became part of International Social Service-USA which was then located on 46th street in Manhattan, right near the United Nations Plaza. From 1965-1969 Joan was part of ISS-USA’s 15 person all women team, (with the exception of the executive director, who was male). Joan, assisted with intercountry adoptions at ISS-USA.

Joan recalled a busy office and a gigantic learning curve. She assisted with the matching of children available through intercountry adoption, mainly from South Korea and Vietnam to parents in the United States. Joan was incredulous at how little ISS charged for its services back then -- 300 dollars. Joan believed ISS should have been charging three times as much. The greatest number of children were placed from Korea and Vietnam years before Korea became the industrialized country of today. Abandoned children in Korea were picked up from the streets and placed in cribs in the hospital. The healthiest were selected by agencies and placed in Korean foster homes where they were loved. There were many tears at the airports from the children and their foster parents as the children traveled to join adoptive families. [Read the full story here.](#)

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SEPARATED: THE ETHICS OF ADOPTION

Over the years ISS-USA has learned a lot about intercountry adoption and the importance of children being with family. While ISS-USA stopped doing intercountry adoptions long ago, as a global ISS network we advocate for best practices that protect children, for children's right to be placed with family or kin and when that is not possible, family based care, ideally in their country of origin. We believe that Intercountry adoption today should be a last resort for children who have no other way to join a family. We also are committed to listening and learning from the diverse experiences of children, now adults, who have been adopted across borders. Through our direct experience in this work and theirs, we must do our best to continue to improve protections for children when they have been separated from family.

The [Finding Humanity Podcast](#) below features Lynelle Long, born in Vietnam and adopted at 5 months by a white family in Victoria, Australia. Lynelle shares her experiences feeling like an outsider as the only nonwhite child in her family and community. As an adoptee, she spent her entire adult life fighting to understand and connect with her identity and her past. The episode also features ISS-USA's Executive Director Julie Rosicky who speaks about financial incentives of international adoption systems, adoptees and adoptive families' rights and services and more.



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COVID HINDERS, BUT DOESN'T PREVENT HOMECOMING

International Social Service, USA (ISS-USA) received a referral from Danielle Miller, a Florida* social worker.

Ms. Miller was working to reunify Maria with her mother, who had been deported to her country of origin, Ecuador. Maria, who was 12 years old, entered foster care when she was 8 years old. Ms. Miller's main concern was ensuring that Maria would be reunified with her mother as quickly and safely as possible.

Ms. Miller first contacted all of Maria's U.S.-based family members about a kinship placement. The hope was that Maria could stay with kin while the placement with her mother was being explored simultaneously. Unfortunately, Maria's maternal aunt and uncle were unable to take her in, and placement with her maternal grandparents was not possible either. Maria remained in foster care and Ms. Miller sought an intercountry home study to assess placement with Maria's mother in Ecuador.

Ms. Miller contacted ISS-USA. Olivia, an Intercountry Case Manager at ISS-USA, was Ms. Miller's point of contact. **"Olivia was extremely helpful in getting the home study and placement process set up. She helped clarify exactly what was needed to get the processes started,"** recalls Ms. Miller, who was not very familiar with intercountry placements. ISS-USA completed the home study as quickly as possible, before the pandemic started. The home study was positive and the plan to reunite Maria with her mother was implemented.

With guidance from Olivia, Ms. Miller immediately began working on obtaining Maria's passport, visa and other necessary documentation. Now with pandemic in full swing, reunification seemed a very dim light at the end of the tunnel. Lockdowns, limited or no travel options, and slowdowns due to working remotely created a series of roadblocks and delays to securing paper work and developing a travel plan. Ms. Miller faced language barriers and needed translated documents, which took extra time. As the months passed and the pandemic continued, ISS-USA per best practice, completed an updated home study in order to ensure that the home remained safe and Maria's mother was still prepared and able to parent her. During this entire process, Ms. Miller ensured that Maria and her mother were able to communicate consistently through web chats and video conferencing. Ms. Miller despite the long list of hurdles that the global pandemic and working across borders presented, remained absolutely steadfast on working toward reunification. Olivia, very accustomed and expert in working under complex conditions, reassured and helped Ms. Miller overcome each and every hurdle.

Maria was finally reunited with her mother in July, 2021. Despite closures and delays related to the pandemic, the relentless work of Ms. Miller and ISS-USA made a happy beginning for mother and daughter possible. **Welcome home, Maria!**

*names and places and all identifying details have been completely sanitized to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the people served by ISS-USA and the people we work with



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MEET THE ISS NETWORK



In collaboration with the [ISS General Secretariat \(ISS\)](#), ISS-USA is launching the “Meet ISS Network” social media campaign. The goal of this campaign is to promote the work of ISS members. It also serves to increase collaboration across the network and showcase what it means to be a part of ISS’s international network. Members have been asked to produce short videos highlighting their organization’s role in the network. Be on the lookout for videos featuring our members from across the globe. Videos will be published across [ISS’s](#) social media channels. **Don’t forget to like and share! #ISSNetwork**

CROSS BORDER WORK AND REDUCING INEQUALITY: A GLOBAL CONVERSATION

In 2020 the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic shined a light on health disparities, poverty, and societal inequities. Meanwhile global protests awakened our collective and universal consciousness of systemic and institutional racism. In response, [The Kempe Center](#) launched A Call to Action to Change Child Welfare Conference to raise the collective consciousness of the impact of poverty, racism, oppression, othering, and inequality on the lives of children and families in child welfare systems.

ISS-USA is honored to be part of the 2021 A Call to Action Conference, taking place virtually from October 4-7, 2021. **ISS-USA will be joined by ISS partners from Australia, Thailand and Mexico** for an [international exchange about cross-border case work as a tool to reduce inequity for children separated from family around the world](#). The live exchange will take place on **October 4th at 8:45pm ET (6:45pm MT)**. A recording will be available for conference registrants.

Attend the Kempe conference and join the conversation to create change in child welfare by connecting communities that are lifting up child and family well-being and social and community justice.

[Register here!](#)



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WELCOME INTERNS!



Khadija Barqadle (above)

Khadija Barqadle joins ISS-USA as a Master of Social Work intern from the University of Maryland, Baltimore. Khadija is a Northern Virginia native with Somali roots. She spent some of her formative years abroad and continued to travel over the years, living in and visiting different parts of the world. These experiences expanded Khadija's worldview from an early age and have influenced her understanding of the importance of cultural humility and recognizing that differences do not have to make us different. Khadija is excited to work with, and learn more about ISS-USA's Intercountry team as well as the Institute and looks forward to lending her experience to her work during her time as an intern



Sewella Barnes (above)

Sewella Barnes joined ISS-USA's team as an BSW intern. She is originally from Portmore, Jamaica and relocated at a young age to West Baltimore. She is currently working on her bachelor's degree in social work. While in college she works with older adults in healthcare. Her work in healthcare sparked her passion to serve as a Social Worker. Sewella plans to pursue her master's this Fall following her bachelor's degree. When she is not working she enjoys trying new restaurants, new vegan recipes, exploring new trails and traveling.



Tracy Kamau (above)

Tracy Kamau currently attends Morgan State University pursuing her Masters in Social Work with a specialization in Urban Children Youth and Families. Tracy also works for Catholic Charities at a homeless shelter, based in Anne Arundel County. She provides intensive case management to individuals experiencing homelessness with the goal of obtaining permanent housing. As a Kenyan-born native, she understands the struggles of integrating into a new culture. Tracy takes pride in advocating for the human rights of immigrants, children, women and other vulnerable populations. She is eager to join the ISS-USA team to increase her knowledge of global issues impacting children and their families.



Eleshia Best Thomas (above)

Eleshia Best Thomas is a second year Master of Social Work Student from Morgan State University. Her area of specialized practice is Urban Children, Youth and Families. She currently has a bachelor's degree in psychology. Eleshia has found her niche in rehabilitation services and works as a Program Director for a Psychiatric Rehabilitation Program in Anne Arundel County. She is a Baltimore native, wife and mother of three. She is also a published author, organized and founded an annual outreach for the homeless called Feed 100 in 2016, enjoys reading and spending time with her family. Her vision is to own and operate a wellness center where the focus is the whole person, mentally, physically and spiritually. Eleshia stands by the motto "treat people the way you would want to be treated" and "be the change that you wish to see in the world."



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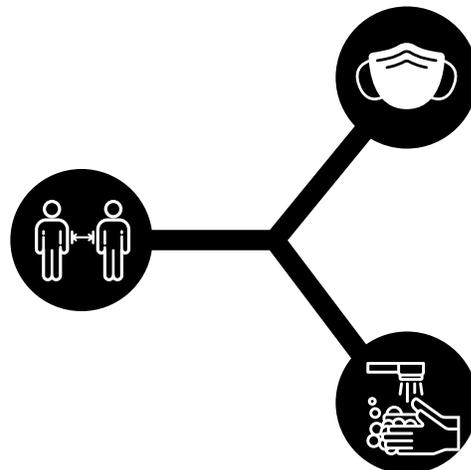
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[Click here for current internship opportunities!](#)

Meredith Mendoza is a DC Native with proud Salvadorean Heritage. She joined ISS-USA through Maryland University as a Masters in Social Work intern. She has a Macro concentration in Community Action and Social Policy. Meredith would like to gain experience in international social work.

ISS-USA'S OPTS FOR "OFFICE OPTIONAL"

ISS-USA, like many organizations, has been going back and forth as to what our "where we work policy" should be. Prior to the increase in the delta variant, we were planning after September 1, to return to the office two days a week, under a work from home, work from office "hybrid model." But given the fluid nature of this ongoing pandemic, ISS-USA, together with its management team, decided to opt for what we affectionately call, "The office optional protocol." What this means is if individuals or small groups want to meet face to face, they can simply choose to work in the office that day following all CDC and OSHA best practice for health and safety. If people have a strong preference for working from home, then this will be respected. **The bottom line is that everyone at ISS-USA is working harder and more hours than ever before because the demand for our work has been relentless.** Because we are all being stretched, we believe in making a plan that works for everyone. Yes, the plants still need water, and there are few of us who see to that. But our staff is simply amazing, and we wanted to create a plan that would respect everyone's comfort level.



Contact Us!
International Social Service, USA
443.451.1219
question@iss-usa.org
www.iss-usa.org

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Join Our Team!

ISS-USA is seeking candidates for the following:



Intake Coordinator

Interested applicants should send a resume and cover letter to question@iss-usa.org and HR@iss-usa.org

Review the full position description, qualifications, and responsibilities [here](#).



Human Resource Coordinator

Please submit resume and writing sample to the ISS-USA Human Resources Department at HR@iss-usa.org

Review the full position description, qualifications, and responsibilities [here](#).

[Apply Now](#)

SEPTEMBER 2021



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DO YOU WORK WITH A STATE, LOCAL OR TRIBAL CHILD WELFARE AGENCY? IF SO, WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

In an effort to improve access to familial resources as placement options for all children, ISS-USA kindly requests that you complete a brief survey as part of an exploratory study on cross-border placements.

The survey should take 10 minutes or less to complete in entirety. Please complete by October 15, 2021. Also, forward to your colleagues who may interact with child/tribal welfare agencies in your jurisdiction.

Access the survey using this link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CrossBorder2021>



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