

## Still More Abandoned Children in Our Country

The number of abandoned children for the first three months of 2009 is higher than the previous year, according to information of the social services. About one third of the abandoned children have severe health problems. Their only chance for life in a family is the international adoption, because there are no Bulgarians to accept disabled children in their families. For 13 years now, an American woman has been helping children to find their home and family. Report by Ivan Georgiev (see the attached file).

Prior to giving birth to her own child, the American Robin Sizemore has adopted two children of Armenian origin from Georgia. After the adoption, Robin started to work with abandoned children. In the course of 13 years she has found parents for some 250 children with cerebral disabilities and the Down syndrome.

Some 38 children of up to 3-year age live at *Sv. Paraskeva* Home for Medical and Social Childcare. One third of them have severe disabilities. No sick children, however, are adopted in Bulgaria.

“The case was same with the American culture some 30 years ago. Whenever a disabled child was born, physicians used to advise the family to abandon their child at such institution or to have an abortion”, said Robin Sizemore, an adoptive parent.

The attitudes of Bulgarian adoptive parents however, change rather slowly. In the last years, there are still more abandoned children of Romany origin. For now, however, children with special needs have no chance to be adopted.

“There are many places in Bulgaria where up to this day they hide disabled children even from their relatives. When a child with a similar problem is born, they say that it has died and the child is placed with an institution”, said Valentina Liharska, Director of *Sv. Paraskeva* HMSC.

For a great number of these children, adoption abroad is the boundary between life and death. The reason for this is the specialized care that children receive, when becoming a part of the social system in the United States or the West European countries. Although no Bulgarian family wishes to adopt a sick child, there are enough candidates from abroad.

“This is something exceptional! Every day we receive calls with the following question: “Will you help us to find a child with the Down syndrome?” There are about 2000 families in USA, waiting for a child with the Down syndrome”, stated Robin Sizemore.

“I have met the negative attitude of people, thinking that children leave for the purposes of becoming subject to trade in organs or exploitation. Such things do not happen! Everything takes place under very strict control, both prior to and after the adoption, and now these children are happy ones”, said Ilonka Raychinova, Deputy-minister of Justice. It is difficult to specify precisely how much time the procedure takes for a child to be placed at the Home and the child’s entry in the international register. The most common reason for such delay is the parents’ unwillingness to abandon their rights, although they neither visit their children nor take care of them. This fact explains the reason why institutions are full, however, there are often no children to adopt. There is also no unified information system about such kids’ condition.