

Now, the potential adoptive parents must attend the school for adoptive parents. This measure is expected to reduce the number of children returning to orphanages and reduce social orphanhood in general.

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On July 1, 2020, the new norm on the mandatory psychological training of adoptive parents entered into force in Kazakhstan, which was included in the Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Marriage (Matrimony) and Family” in December last year. The certificate of this training completion is now included in the list of documents required for those wishing to adopt a child.

Along with the government agencies, non-profit organizations for assisting in the placement of orphans and children left without parental care can be engaged in the adoptive parents’ training. This concept is newly introduced into the Code, as well as the regulation of the activities of organizations engaged in adoption processes.

The initiator of the amendments was the Public Fund “Ana Uyi” (“Mother’s House”), which conducts Schools for Adoptive Parents for several years. As the founder of the Fund **Anar Rakhimbaeva** explained, they are engaged in the prevention of social orphanhood. The project of creation “Mother’s House” crisis centers’ network throughout the country was initially aimed at preventing it.



Anar Rakhimbaeva. Photo provided by “Ana Uyi” Public Fund

Currently, there are over 20 of these centers in 18 cities of Kazakhstan. With their assistance, in seven years, from 2013 to 2020, over four thousand kids did not end up in orphanages. Young pregnant women and those who have recently delivered, who were going to abandon their children due to the difficult life situation,

received a temporary shelter and raised the children. This work prevents about 70% of mothers from abandoning their newborn children.

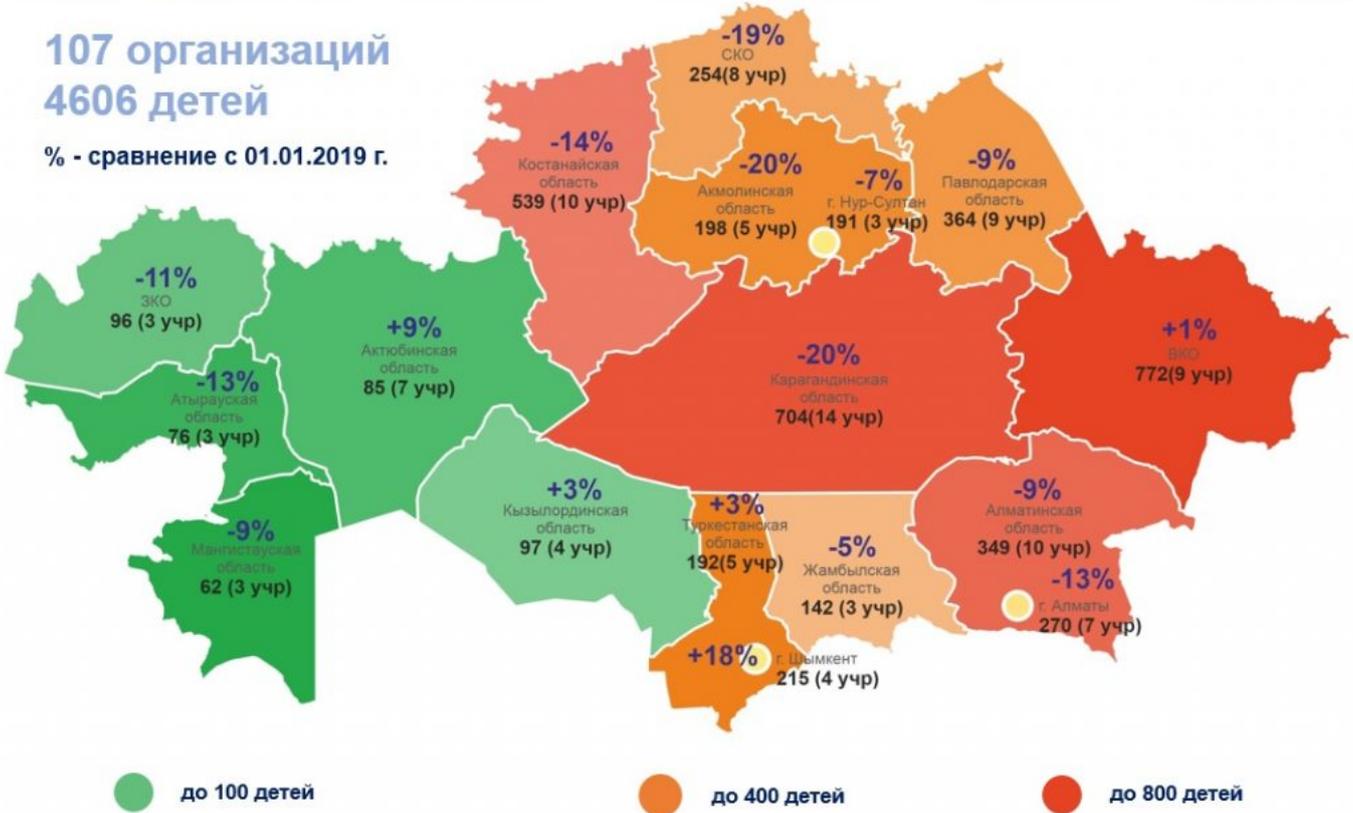
“However, later we realized that this does not solve the orphanhood problem completely,” continued Anar Rakhimbaeva. “Children of different ages continue to fill the orphanages. Therefore, the next stage of the Fund’s work was the launch of the National Adoption Agency in 2016, aimed at developing the culture of adoption in Kazakh society and professional support for adoptive families.”

Why Are the Schools for Parents Needed?

To assist, the free School for Adoptive Parents was created, the main task of which was to prevent repeated abandonments - the return of a child from the adoptive family back to the orphanage. According to the “Ana Uyi” Fund, their number reaches 18-20% in Kazakhstan. The reasons are the insufficient, primarily psychological, preparedness of parents to adopt a child from an orphanage and their high expectations.

“When a family adopts a child, a number of difficulties appear, for which they are not often prepared. Initially, parents imagine the perfect picture, but in reality, everything is different. In order to survive the adaptation period as painlessly as possible, before the child comes to the family, the adoptive parents must know how to help him, how to react to certain problems and situations, what are the mentality of children in orphanages, etc.,” says Rakhimbaeva.

**СИТУАЦИЯ ПО КОЛИЧЕСТВУ ВОСПИТАННИКОВ И ОРГАНИЗАЦИЙ
ДЛЯ ДЕТЕЙ-СИРОТ И ДЕТЕЙ, ОБПР в РК на 01.01.2020 г.**



"Ana Uyi" Fund map

Over the four years of the Fund's work, about 1,700 families attended the School for Adoptive Parents, 800 of them adopted children. Anar Rakhimbaeva considers this a very important indicator:

This is the main point. When a family attends the School, they begin to realize a great responsibility. Every second family once again thought, once again checked their motivation: are we able to, can we cope?

The Fund's experience revealed that only 30-40% of the applicants for adoption are really able to adopt a child. Therefore, the Fund's representatives are sure: it is better to eliminate the failed adoptive parents at the beginning, than later send the child back to the orphanage. The repeated abandonment is the strongest psychological trauma for the children, even greater than the first time.

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan considers the repeated admission of children to the orphanages as the main current problem in the field of adoption. To solve it, as the Deputy Minister of Education and Science **Bibigul Asylova** emphasized, mandatory psychological training of adoptive parents and monitoring of these families and children after adoption are introduced.



Bibigul Asylova Photo: Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan

“Not everyone is ready to accept the children with their inherent personalities. This is due to both the low awareness of adoptive parents about the psychological traits of a child who experienced the separation from the parents and is brought up in an orphanage, and the specifics of these children’s development,” she notes.

As a result, as Bibigul Asylova concluded, adoptive parents feel that the problems are unsurmountable, contact with the child is broken, and a feeling of irritation and disappointment appears.

The Deputy Minister is convinced that the obligatory attendance of the School for Adoptive Parents will help reducing the repeated admission of children into orphanages. It will also allow adoptive parents to have a clear idea of the educational competencies they need: the values, knowledge and skills.

Listen to Every Word

The School for Adoptive Parents graduate and adoptive parent **Natalia Ismailova** considers such training very necessary.

“I personally faced many aspects that we discussed in the school,” she said. “There was all sorts of things: aggression and other problems. I can confirm that when a person decides to take a child into his family, he actually has his head in the clouds. In fact, he is not 100 percent aware of what he will face.”



Natalia Ismailova. Photo provided by "Ana Uyi" Public Fund

The adopted child's behavior during the adaptation period, which may seem abnormal, in fact, as Natalia believes, is quite common. To correct it, the patience is necessary. Therefore, Natalia Ismailova advises all future adoptive parents to listen to the lessons very carefully.

"It is necessary to listen attentively to every word and sentence, to analyze the covered material, re-read it again at home. Once again, remember the considered situations and search for the answer: how would I behave if, for example, a child fell on the floor, spinning around and yelling like crazy? Look at yourself in the mirror and ask: can I even cope with my emotions?" she says.

The adoptive mother added that after finishing School and adopting a child, it is necessary to be prepared for any situation.

"Because the real life is just beginning," she explained. "Each child behaves differently. It is impossible to describe in the notebook (which is given to parents at school - Ed.) everything that expects you."

Anar Rakhimbaeva admits that the School is not a panacea.

"This is theoretical knowledge; not all questions can be covered and predicted," says the Fund's founder. "In practice, the life can show completely different aspects. There may be unforeseen difficulties in the family, certain problems in the adaptation process."

To cope with them, there is also the obligatory monitoring of the family after the School. In difficult times, the adoptive parents can count on the professional help of psychologists from the organizations that trained them.

Thus, the introduced amendments grant the non-government adoption agencies and organizations promoting the orphans' placement into families the legal right to train potential parents, provide them with legal assistance, as well as psychological and pedagogical consultations.

Together Against Orphanhood

Thus, in fact, the work of NGOs for placement of the children in families was legalized, in which they were engaged voluntarily on their own initiative before the amendments. Since last year, “Ana Uyi” is working as part of a pilot joint project with local executive bodies in nine regions of Kazakhstan.

Of course, there is no monopoly. Any organization accredited by the Children Rights Protection Committee of the Ministry of Education and Science can help the state to place the children into families by organizing the Schools for Adoptive Parents and monitoring. In total, according to the law, there should be no more than 20 of them.

Currently, according to the Committee, no one received accreditation so far, and only one NGO is under consideration. They did not name which one.

In addition to “Ana Uyi”, other organizations also conducted the Schools for Adoptive Parents, for example, the Community of Adoptive Parents of Kazakhstan Public Fund. According to the Fund’s website, this Community helped 299 adopted children in finding their families by 2019.

The Ministry positively assesses the cooperation with NGOs in this sphere and the official status of organizations that assist in orphans’ placement. At the same time, they emphasize that the registration of orphans and children left without parents, decisions on their placement in families, registration of candidates for adoptive parents, as well as control over adopted children remains with the state.

The specialist of the family placement of the “Ana Uyi” Fund **Galiya Zhusipova**, who previously headed the Children Rights Protection Department in South Kazakhstan (now Turkestan) region for many years, as a former state employee, regrets that there was no such level of partnership and support from NGOs before.

Now, speaking on behalf of the non-governmental sector, she notes the effectiveness of the joint teamwork of the non-governmental adoption agencies with the child protection services.



Galiya Zhusipova. Photo provided by “Ana Uyi” Public Fund

Galiya Zhusipova emphasizes that the amendments to the legislation proved that the authorities reacted to the civil society. The source believes that turning to the NGOs for help, delegating part of the work to them is in the interests of the state bodies now, since the NGOs have more opportunities, time and resources.

“We are mobile, we do not depend on the state, because our Fund exists not on budgetary funds, but on the money of the benefactors,” Galiya Zhusipova argues. “The child protection services are very busy, they do not always have the opportunity to travel and monitor the families, to solve problems arising in the adaptation process. We do have such opportunities.”

The specialist added that she is ready to declare the necessity and importance of the Schools for Adoptive Parents at any time. They prevent the bitter situations when the adoptive family wants to return the child back to the orphanage, because they did not get along, they do not like the child anymore, etc.

“The School for Adoptive Parents, of course, is not a panacea and cannot solve all the problems, but it is a powerful prevention of repeated abandonments,” Zhusipova claims.

Zhandos Kaltaev, who headed the Shymkent Department for Family, Children and Youth Affairs, which was terminated in this June, shares the same opinion.

“If people, after finishing the School, admit that they are not ready to adopt a child, we can only rejoice,” he says. “This means they will not cause another trauma.”

To Involve Former Orphans

The President of the Association of Orphanages Graduates of Kazakhstan **Rafael Gasanov** supports the introduction of the obligatory training for adoptive parents. Moreover, he believes that attending the School for Adoptive Parents is necessary not only for adoption, but also for other forms of placing the children in a family: foster care and guardianship.



Rafael Gasanov. Photo from personal Facebook page

Gasanov also proposes to conduct a preliminary selection of candidates for training identifying the motives of potential adoptive parents. In addition, he raised the question: who are the trainers?

“Only the professional trainers should prepare parents for the arrival of a child in the family,” the Head of the Association believes. “We need to involve mothers who have this experience, and the graduates of orphanages themselves.”

He is convinced that it is imperative to seek help, support and advice from former orphans on all issues related to orphanages, their problems and innovations. No one else can know better about the experiences and difficulties of this category of children.

In general, specialists and experts share the same opinion about the importance and necessity of the Schools for Adoptive Parents and are confident in the effectiveness of introducing the requirement for its obligatory attendance. This is based on the results of the work of the “Ana Uyi” Fund. The number of children returning from the families of the School graduates, who studied there on their own will, is two times lower than the overall indicator in Kazakhstan.

According to Anar Rakhimbaeva, they witnessed 36 cases of repeated abandonment.

“It is 10% less,” she comments. “This is the global average level. Even in developed European countries and the USA, abandonments average 8-10%. Unfortunately, there are no perfect results anywhere.”

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan states that in recent years there was a decline in both orphanhood and the number of children in orphanages, as well as the number of orphanages.

If in 2015 the total number of orphans and children left without parental care was 29 666, then in 2019 it decreased to 24 529. Over 10 years (2010-2020), the number of children in orphanages decreased by 70%: from 14 052 up to 4 193 people. At the same time, the number of orphanages decreased from 210 to 101, by 52%.

Title photo: 7sisters.ru

This article was prepared as part of the Giving Voice, Driving Change - from the Borderland to the Steppes Project.



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