

# FRANK

ADOPTION CENTER



## SIERRA LEONE PROGRAM GUIDE

### About Our Program:

Frank Adoption Center has been working in Sierra Leone since the beginning of 2018. We have partnered with a few children's homes in and around Freetown that we have been very impressed with because the children are well cared for and they work to also support their local communities. Some also have very active and well-run foster care and family reunification programs. Many children are able to be adopted by their foster parents or reunified with their first families. This means the children available for international adoption are truly available – international adoption is their last best option. This also means that the majority of the children are older – over the age of 6. Many were orphaned by the Ebola crisis; some had Ebola themselves and have since recovered. Also, many were orphaned during the tragic mudslides in Sierra Leone in recent years.

We are working with a phenomenal attorney in Freetown, a woman named Isatu Jalloh. She is an incredibly skilled attorney with a wonderful reputation. She is thorough and assertive and an absolute asset to our program in Sierra Leone.

We have traveled to Sierra Leone as an agency and been able to meet with our partners in person as well as visit and meet with Sierra Leone government offices and officials of the ministry and courts, and also with the US embassy. While we have great confidence in our team in Sierra Leone, it is important to remember this is still a new program in a non-Hague convention country so we must remain flexible.

### Overview:

Families should expect a process time of 18+ months with a minimum of 3 trips 10-14 day trips. Families should be open to referrals of children over the age of 6.

## Process Steps:

1. The first step in the adoption process is to obtain a Hague Accredited Primary Provider in the US (adoption agency), this is the role Frank Adoption Center serves.
2. The second step is to obtain a home study provider in your home state. (We are happy to give you recommendations for this.) The home study agency will access your home and family to determine your eligibility to adopt according to US and international regulations. They will then write a full report that our agency will review. Once the report is approved and printed, we will use it to take our next steps. Estimate 60-90 days for this step, but this will vary from agency to agency and state to state.
3. Step 3 is I600a submission and approval. We will help you submit your home study report and supporting documents to USCIS with an I600a application to get approval from the US government to adopt from Sierra Leone.
4. Step 4 is dossier assembly and submission (many families work on this simultaneously with their home study, but we'll help with instructions and timing when we start to move forward). We will help you assemble a dossier of all necessary documents to be submitted to the ministry and courts in Sierra Leone. Once this is complete, we will be ready to submit it to the attorney in Sierra Leone, Isatu Jalloh, and she will begin representing you in your process there.
5. Step 5 is Matching and Referral. Frank Adoption Center will present you with a referral of a child or children eligible for international adoption for your family to consider. We will do our best to give you as much information as is available on the child. At this time each family will be assigned additional education hours specific to the needs of your child and family through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that will need to be completed before your child comes home.
6. Step 6 is 6 month guardianship, which is largely served by-proxy via financial sponsorship and weekly communications. Once your Dossier is submitted, a minimum of 5 hours of course work from your IEP has been completed, and we have obtained all needed documents on your matched child in Sierra Leone, you can schedule your FIRST TRIP! You will travel to Sierra Leone to visit your child(ren) and spend 10-14 days getting to know them better as well as attending a few important meetings! Frank Adoption Center will work together with Isatu Jalloh to begin the guardianship step with the ministry in Sierra Leone. The ministry will review your case and establish formal and legal guardianship. Once the ministry signs your guardianship letter, the 6 month period begins. During this time we will send \$100 a month per child for support of your child(ren) on your behalf. You will have ongoing communication with your child(ren) through WhatsApp or Skype to build your connection. Documentation of this time will be compiled and presented later in your process. Families should anticipate continuing monthly support beyond the 6 month period for as long as their child(ren) are in the care of that facility. It is now taking about 2-4 weeks after your meeting with the ministry for them review the case and sign your guardianship letter and the 6 months to begin.

7. Step 7 is court to complete your adoption in Sierra Leone. Isatu will secure a court date for your adoption case to be heard before a judge in Freetown. Once you have completed a minimum of 5 more IEP hours (for a total of 10 IEP hours), your 6 months are completed, and Isatu has obtained all documentation required for court from the ministry, you will be able to return for your second trip and anticipate a 14 day stay in which you will attend court. Once court is complete and approved, you are now the legal parents of your children! Isatu will gather all legal documents from the court and ministry and submit them to Frank Adoption Center so we can begin the next step to help you get your child(ren) home. You'll return to the US to wait out the remainder of the process while Isatu and Joseph (FAC facilitator in Sierra Leone) and/or the children's home team act as your POAs in your absence. It typically takes 2-4 weeks post court for Isatu to gather all documents.
8. Step 8 is I600 assembly and submission. Once FAC has the documents from Isatu, we will work together with Dempsey Law here in the US to submit your I600 application to USCIS to seek approval for your child(ren) to immigrate back to the US. Once we submit the I600 it will be reviewed and approved here in the US. This is typically taking 2+ months. Once we receive approval, your case will be sent to the US embassy in Freetown for investigation and final approval. *Note: Many families also use this time to obtain a Sierra Leonean Passport for their child via a POA. FAC will instruct you on this step.*
9. Step 9 is DS260 Application. This is an online form that you will be invited to complete after the approval of your I-600. We will help with instructions when the time comes.
10. Step 10 is I604 Investigation. This is an investigation by the US embassy meant to confirm and validate all of the paperwork submitted to them. We will assist with any questions they have during this time. The embassy states that their goal is to have the i604 investigation completed within 90 days. During this time they may conduct interviews at the embassy and/or send out field investigators to speak with witnesses in the case. Once they are satisfied that everything is true and complete they will grant approval for the visa(s) for the child(ren).
11. Step 11 is a medical exam. The child(ren) will have to clear a visa medical examination and the results submitted to the US embassy. This exam will consist of at least 2 visits that are 48-72 hours apart but could require additional treatment depending on their health and vaccination records. This appointment can only be scheduled once we have permission from the embassy. We can help facilitate this appointment with a POA if you are not in Sierra Leone. At this time, families will be assigned a final pre-travel education plan to refresh your knowledge and prepare you for bringing home your child. These education hours will need to be completed before your 3<sup>rd</sup> and final trip.
12. Finally in Step 12 you will return for your 3<sup>rd</sup> and final trip to pick up the visa and bring your children home to the US! Your child(ren) will become US citizens upon entry to the country and should receive a COC and SS card in mail 6-8 weeks after coming home. (With the exception of children over 13; they will receive a letter from USCIS inviting them to come take the oath of citizenship where they will then receive their COCs in person.)