

Guatemala launches new program to help adoptees access records

People who are adopted may wonder "Who am I? What's my story?" The government of Guatemala has launched a new program to help adoptees find their roots.

MARIN COUNTY, CALIFORNIA, UNITED STATES, September 17, 2021

/EINPresswire.com/ -- An estimated 30,000-50,000 children were adopted from Guatemala to the United States and Europe before intercountry adoptions from Guatemala closed permanently in January 2008. Tens of thousands of those children are now adults who may wonder "Who am I? What's my story?" Many hire professional "searchers" who facilitate reunions with biological family. Others connect through social media or DNA.



Benjamin Fossen, co-founder of Adoptees with Guatemalan Roots (left), meets with Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei

A new way to search is now available to adoptees seeking information about their roots and identity. The government of Guatemala, in conjunction with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and National Council of Adoptions (CNA), has launched a program specifically designed for adoptees. Adoptees submit an online form with names of their birth parents, birthplace, and dates of their birth and adoption. The information is submitted to Guatemala's population registry in search of a match. The service is free of charge.

Thirty-one-year-old Benjamin Fossen, living in the U.S. and co-founder of the international organization Adoptees with Guatemalan Roots (AWGR), has been active in the creation and launch of Guatemala's new program. I chatted with Ben via email about his participation.

Jessica O'Dwyer: Tell us how you got involved in Guatemala's new program for adoptees.

Benjamin Fossen: The vision for the program grew out of conversations I had with my AWGR co-founder Mason Jerman and our executive director Kendal Miller. AWGR was founded in 2019 to build community and help adoptees find their identities. One way to do that is by accessing documents such as birth certificates, which are stored in the Guatemalan databank known as RENAP. Guatemalan citizens can access RENAP's online services, but more streamlined access by Guatemalan adoptees required presidential approval.

In January 2021, we met with President Alejandro Giammattei in Guatemala City. Meeting the president to make a formal request on behalf of adoptees was a tremendous honor and incredible experience. In our proposal, we highlighted how adoptees are a big asset to Guatemala. We are well educated, we are talented athletes, and we possess important social and economic capital. Our birthright makes us Guatemalan citizens. President Giammattei approved the project and soon after the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reached out to request more information to help build the program.

JOD: How does the program benefit adoptees who access its services?

BF: First and foremost, the program is a formal recognition by the Guatemalan government that we are Guatemalan citizens. Adoptees have often been a forgotten group of people. This recognition helps adoptees realize we are not forgotten.

The services offered are two-pronged. The first service through CNA allows adoptees to find their origins and birth families free of charge. The second service allows adoptees to use RENAP to obtain birth certificates, passports and DPIs (national identity cards). The RENAP service is free to use but there are normal fees to get documents.

As citizens, adoptees can work in Guatemala, represent the country at international sporting events, vote in elections and even hold political office. In 2021, we saw Matan Peleg, an adoptee from Israel, play on the Guatemalan national soccer team. Matan is the first adoptee to play for Guatemala and we hope to see more talented adoptees follow in his footsteps.

Obtaining a birth certificate and DPI makes it easier for all adoptees to participate in Guatemalan society, a key first step to finding identity and building community.

JOD: Reuniting with birth family, whether in person or online, can be emotional for an adoptee. Typically, searchers who facilitate such reunions are trained social workers skilled in anticipating and managing reactions that may feel overwhelming. How does the Guatemalan program address the possibility that learning a birth parent's identity or communicating for the first time might elicit strong feelings?

BF: Trained social workers on CNA staff conduct searches and facilitate reunions. One of the questions on the CNA intake form asks about "psychological support the adoptee is receiving," which shows that CNA understands the complex nature of birth family reunions.

Our organization, Adoptees with Guatemalan Roots, is also a place where adoptees can learn from others who have already done birth family searches and reunifications. We're not trained social workers, but we have lived experience navigating these unique situations. We want to stress that the choice to search is deeply personal and that adoptees should do so only when they are ready. The experience can be life changing. There is a wide range of potential outcomes and not all of them are positive.

JOD: A truism about delving into a Guatemalan adoption file is that you never know what you'll discover. Names, addresses and birth stories may be fabricated, which can make finding a potential birth parent impossible. What is the response of the Guatemalan government when information is found to be falsified?

BF: There was corruption and fraud involved in the adoption process and in some cases, information was fabricated or falsified. This adds to the complexity of trying to find birth families. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has communicated to us that they're committed to helping as many adoptees as possible find their origins. Getting the government to provide services and recognize adoptees as citizens was the first step. We hope to continue to work with the government to help those adoptees with fraudulent paperwork. AWGR is committed to serving the global adoption community.

JOD: How can people learn more about Guatemala's new program for adoptees?

BF: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has created a webpage for the services which can be found here: minex.gob.gt/Visor_Pagina.aspx?PaginaID=2250. The link to get the forms for the free birth family search is available in English, Spanish, German, and French and can be found here on the CNA website: cna.gob.gt/busquedadeOrigenes. You can also find Adoptees with Guatemalan Roots at our website: guateroots.org.

Jessica O'Dwyer is author of *Mother Mother and Mamalita: An Adoption Memoir* and adoptive mother to two teens from Guatemala. She lives in California.

Jessica O'Dwyer
Jessica O'Dwyer Author
+1 415-686-2771

[email us here](#)

Visit us on social media:

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/551478929>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something

we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2021 IPD Group, Inc. All Right Reserved.