

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast  
Connecting Cross-Border Families TRANSCRIPT

Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Elaine Weisman, International Social Service USA

[00:00:00]: [Music Introduction]

**FEMALE NARRATOR** [00:00:03]: This is the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, a place for those who care about strengthening families and protecting children. You'll hear about the innovations, emerging trends and success stories across child welfare direct from those striving to make a difference. This is your place for new ideas and information to support your work to improve the lives of children, youth, and families.

**TOM OATES** [00:00:34]: Well, thank you once again for joining us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. So glad you can be a part of this with us. I'm Tom Oates. You know, over the past number of months, and frankly longer than that, there's been a conversation brewing across the US regarding immigration and citizenship, but that also impacts some decisions regarding children in the middle of this question. And of course that has a connection to child welfare, foster care, and reunifying families. But this is only part of a broader conversation around managing cases with international connections or cross-border families. And as today's guest explains, it's diverse and it's complicated. And yes, family separation and unaccompanied minors are definitely a part of cross-border families, but caseworkers are facing all types of challenges in connecting children with foreign born parents or connecting children to other family resources who live outside the US. These challenges include recognizing if there are family members outside the country, trying to find those family resources, navigating the legal parameters, and understanding where title IV-E funds can – and cannot – be applied.

[00:01:48]: Our guest today is Elaine Weisman. She is the program and training manager for International Social Service USA – part of the International Social Service network of legal and social work professionals who try to connect vulnerable children, adults and families who are separated by international borders to the services and support that they need. Now, part of their services are to work with child welfare cases referred to them for such things as relative tracing, home studies for relative placements or parental custody, child welfare checks or caregiver background checks, post-placement follow-up, or technical assistance. So, we dive into this complex conversation, we try to bust some myths, and share a bit more about what state and local agencies can do when faced with cases involving cross-border families and more likely than not agencies have these types of cases already in their current workload. Glad to chat with Elaine Weisman of International Social Service USA here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast.

[00:02:50]: Elaine Weisman, welcome in to the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

**ELAINE WEISMAN** [00:02:54]: Thank you so much, it's a pleasure to be here.

**TOM OATES** [00:02:56]: Well, I appreciate the time here and I wanna help our audience off the start by giving them a sense of where it is that ISS kind of has this role but connects and, you know, has an

external association with children and cross-border families. So, to give our audience who always have this child welfare perspective that they bring in listening, can you describe the types of work and the services that ISS provides and how those services are related to those aspects of child welfare, foster care and adoption.

**ELAINE WEISMAN** [00:03:30]: Of course. So, International Social Service USA is actually the US branch of a larger network of legal and social service agencies with partners in about 120 countries around the world. And so, the mission of ISS USA is to connect children and families separated by an international border - primarily international - to the services and support they need and that can look a lot of different ways. What I mostly talk about in these kinds of conversations specifically related to child welfare is around providing cross-border case management for cases that involve some kind of cross-border issue. So, one of the easy ways to kind of think about what that looks like is say, for example, we have a child who is in foster care in Maryland - our offices happen to be based in Maryland, but we take cases from around the country and around the world.

[00:04:32]: So, we have a child in care in Maryland, maybe she has a grandmother in Jamaica or an aunt who is serving in the military in Germany and Maryland comes to us, they're looking at resources for this child in care and our organization helps get things like home studies on the grandmother or the aunt, obtain documents like birth certificates and background checks and other things. We facilitate that engagement with the family in the other country, making sure that they can participate in court, that they have connection to the agency that has custody of the child. And then, certainly, if the child is placed with that grandmother or the aunt in the other country, we help make sure that there's the availability for post-placement reporting.

[00:05:20]: So, a lot of people think about this like the ICPC - the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children - kind of facilitating the connection of social service system in one place to the social service system in the other place. And importantly, I think, a big piece of that working case management is making sure that the information provided to the stakeholders in Maryland, have the information from Jamaica or Germany that can help a judge here make an informed decision that's specific to that child's case and so, really making sure that we're providing some, helping the worker in Maryland understand some of the international components, next steps, responsibilities on each side and some of that assistance in making sure that everybody has the information they need to keep the child safe and include resources overseas.

[00:06:15]: So, that's kind of the best example I can give around some of what cross-border case management looks like. And then a lot of what we do is in technical assistance, so really anybody who has a question related to a child who might be in care with an international aspect, it may be that we can't provide a direct service, but we can certainly help connect child welfare workers, supervisors, really anybody involved in the system to some of the resources that may, may help them.

**TOM OATES** [00:06:48]: You know, I hope our audience has taken away the understanding of what a cross-border family really looks like and the, kind of, various ways that you can have families with connections internationally. And you mentioned questions and of course, you know, right now, as we're recording this, there's been a lot of attention about children and borders - either being separated at the

border and the idea of immigrant children from south of the border - but I'd like you to kind of take this view from your experience over dealing with, you know a cross-border family issue for years and years and years. Give us a sense about the total reality of what cross-border issues are really looking like in terms of, like, the number of cases and what this really looks like in terms of where we are versus maybe the questions and the misperceptions that we may have in the back of our minds.

**ELAINE WEISMAN** [00:07:42]: Absolutely, no, I really appreciate that question because I think there is a lot of assumptions when we talk about cross-border families that we're talking about immigrant kids, and exclusively immigrant kids, and that's really not the case. So, certainly many of the children that we serve in our case management program are immigrants, others are children of immigrants, we, there's also a lot of US citizen children who have family resources in other countries that we also don't really think about at all. So, one of the things that we always mention to people, especially when we're doing trainings and kind of talking about our work is that one in four children in the United States today has a foreign born parent, at least one foreign born parent.

[00:08:29]: And, it's important to think about that's not just in states that people might be thinking about, that's a national trend -

**TOM OATES** [00:08:39]: It's not a geographic issue.

**ELAINE WEISMAN** [00:08:42]: Exactly, absolutely not. Certainly, that number may be higher in some places and lower in others, but one in four is a pretty good representation of what we're talking about when we're talking about kids who have a foreign-born parent. And so, we have to think about a lot of those kids have family still in other countries. Now, the other thing, and as I mentioned, the, you know, our organization has been around for almost a century - we're celebrating 95 years this year - and the majority of our work, really has been with child welfare systems and with foster systems and, you know, when we think about that, we think about kids who are coming into care because of abuse and neglect, the loss of a parent from death, from incarceration, from drug abuse, from all sorts of things. We think about kids who have been trafficked, kids who have also been involved in juvenile justice system.

[00:09:43]: And so, we, when we kind of put some of these together, we have to assume that some of the kids who are in our state child welfare systems have family resources overseas that are just, frankly, being overlooked. And you do mention the issue of kids being separated at the border and I certainly don't wanna discount that as another group of kids we're serving, we do have separate programming for kids who have been separated at the border and are either seeking to return or are being deported. So, that is another group of children that we serve in our programming. But, the other piece of that is I think we are really missing some data on how kids maybe in those categories are ending up in state child welfare systems or US born kids whose parents after some incident of immigration enforcement may be ending up in our state system.

[00:10:44]: So, you know, I think there's lots of different ways we work with these systems and lots of different status considerations in the work that we do. So, I think it's just something that we see on a case by case basis around really looking at what the circumstances have been and broadening that lens of who these kids are that have cross-border family connections.

**TOM OATES** [00:11:08]: Yeah and when you're dealing with agencies that have a case like this and with the number you just mentioned of one in four children with a foreign born parent, it is more likely than not that there are agencies who do have situations like this, those questions kind of span the gamut in terms of trying to make those connections and that can cause a lot of roadblocks for agencies to wonder hey, where do I go from here - and I wanna touch base on that, especially when you talked about the difference when it comes to children who are under the care of state and local foster care systems. But, we do have this phrase - unaccompanied minors - and you started to pick away at what the reality is for us. What are those misperceptions that, not only with the public, but with child welfare agencies that they may have about that current situation with unaccompanied minors or children separated from their families by borders or other situations?

**ELAINE WEISMAN** [00:12:05]: Sure, so, you know, there's a few, I think, you know, as I said, when we talk about children who are separated from their families, we often think about immigrant kids as those being the kids and that's the full picture. I think the other one perhaps misperception is, you know, like I said, there's one in four children in the US has an immigrant parent - I think there's a lot of systems that kind of think, well not in my care, not in my state, not here. And I think that's a really dangerous misperception. One of the things we're always encouraging front line workers to do and child welfare workers and really any of the organizations we work with is just to make sure we're asking some of those questions and not just making assumptions about who is and who isn't.

[00:13:03]: I think the other thing, you know, I mentioned we have some programming around children who have been separated at the border or children who are classified as unaccompanied minors, so we know some children and youth enter or attempt to enter the United States as an unaccompanied minor are truly traveling on their own without an adult caregiver, those are considered unaccompanied minors and then there's also children of all ages who are traveling with a family member or family members and as a result of some enforcement at the border are separated from those family members and then categorized as unaccompanied.

[00:13:47]: There's been a lot in the news and it's not, perhaps, the place here to go into all of the pieces of it, but, one of the things we know is that there's a lot of work to make sure these kids have legal representation and that's very important. And I think there's also kind of this perception or misperception that all children, these children should stay here and that's also kind of something that we're looking at. One of the things that's really important about our work at ISS USA is that we are a neutral party in all of the work that we do, so we never advocate for a child to stay or to be reunified with the parent or to go back to a home country without understanding what, really, the situation is.

[00:14:36]: And so, when we talk about the work that we do to, kind of do assessments on families and communities in a country of return or a parent's home country, we're not talking about making sure kids leave or deporting kids or are advocating to deport. I think what we really wanna make sure is that each of these situations are unique, each child's history is unique and it's really important that whatever way the child, a child entered care, we're looking at the unique circumstances to make sure that we're getting the information we need for decision makers to make those decisions in an informed way. So, I think that's another piece we always kind of make sure that we're talking about is, it's not about sending

kids away, it's about really making sure there's the resources to keep kids safe with family wherever that family is. So, those are a few.

**TOM OATES** [00:15:33]: Yeah, and in terms of helping those state and local agencies, you know, fulfill the needs of that case, you talked about it's just the idea of connecting families or reunifying families. And so, we've got a couple of different classifications here that people may be a little bit confused about, so hopefully you can help us out, right, not like there's enough confusion about this topic. But, especially when you are dealing with children who are in the care of state and local foster care system versus those that fall under the care of HHS, or the Office of Refugee and Resettlement. Can you clarify some distinctions for us here?

**ELAINE WEISMAN** [00:16:13]: Sure. I can do my best, and you're right, it is confusing and I think that's, kind of, you know, we advocate also for a lot more resources around training and helping states understand the difference because a lot of us just don't. I think, so there's a few key distinctions. So, first, when we talk about kids who are, so, perhaps to start, you mentioned the Office of Refugee Resettlement. So, kids who are apprehended at the US border are transferred to the care and custody of the Office of Refugee and Resettlement, so that is a federal foster care system. The majority of those kids are cared for through ORR subcontractors who are state licensed or are funded care providers under the Flores Agreement, ORR does need to release children to the least restrictive setting possible, as quickly as possible.

[00:17:21]: And then, as they're there, again, they're in these care settings around the country and those organizations are providing some case management while seeking either a family sponsor to serve as an appropriate caregiver for that unaccompanied child and some children are placed in long-term foster care placements. Again, this is all still under the, it's a federally funded system. It's important to know that, so, once a child has been released by ORR to a sponsor, they no longer have responsibility for that child, so, if there's a disruption, something happens, that sponsor is no longer able to care for the child or safely care for the child, the child cannot return to ORR care. That is where services end, so in many cases, those children would then, if need be, if there's concerns, would end up in state child welfare systems, which we know are administered at a state or county level and receive some federal funds under Title IV-E for foster care services. However, undocumented children who enter those foster care systems are not eligible to receive reimbursement through Title IV-E funds. So, the states in fact incur the full cost of services, providing services to those kids.

[00:19:05]: So, that's kind of a big, important difference and it can be confusing. And, like I said, I think, that is often times where we're missing a lot of information and missing some opportunities that working together and increasing training opportunities that there's not a lot - as far as I understand - a lot of good data on how many kids are in the situation of ending up going from an ORR care to a sponsor to state systems. The other thing is there are other undocumented children who are in the United States and may end up in state child welfare, in foster care or under the care of a state child welfare system without going through ORR. So, you know, if a family has been living in the United States for some years, entered undetected or whatnot, if there's a need for a state to then assume protective custody of that child, the same would apply, they would not be eligible for Title IV-E funds, but they also would not have gone through the ORR system, so, it is confusing.

**TOM OATES** [00:20:27]: So, let's try to dive into a little bit of those, especially those state and local agencies that are trying to, you know, work with cross-border families. And you mentioned a pretty big barrier, at least in terms of a financial barrier on where Title IV-E can and cannot be applied in terms of funds. Give me a sense if you can about maybe those other barriers, either internally or externally that may, that agencies may face in moving forward to try to best help connect these cross-border families.

**ELAINE WEISMAN** [00:21:00]: Sure. So, I think, you know, the kind of putting some of the understanding of the differences in the system and how to manage cases of undocumented kids and dealing with the immigration issues, just to put that aside for a moment - I think, as I mentioned before, one of the biggest barriers is just simply identifying some of these cases soon enough. And, you know, there was kind of chatter about this potential situation where undocumented kids, say, who are unaccompanied or separated children who are ending up in care were gonna be adopted by families here without ever looking for their biological families, their families of origin in a home country and that's certainly a concern. But, I think, even more broadly, just this idea of just because a parent or a caregiver is not with the child does not mean that they have necessarily abandoned the child and couldn't be a proper caregiver. So, really kind of starting early to ask the questions, identify these kids and find families quickly before the permanency planning gets to that place where a kids been in foster care for months or years and you're only just now finding a parent or a potential caregiver. So, that's kind of a big one.

[00:22:40]: I think there's also some just inherent biases in the way that our systems operate, as we all are human. But, I think, you know, one of the things we talk about - and this has been studied - is around, kind of, perhaps a fear of the unknown. You know, we've been already talking this morning about, kind of, some confusion and the way the media shapes what we think about when we think about cross-border issues and I think that that can seep a little bit into the way we think about cross-border cases in general and the way that we perceive quality of life in other countries, standards of living in other countries and this idea that perhaps children are always better off in the US. And that's something that we really try and explore with our partners and states around, kind of, how we're making these decisions and how we're approaching case work and how we're engaging with families in different places. You know, as I mentioned, we work both on cases of kids who are in foster care in the United States with family overseas and also kids who are overseas and have family in the United States and there are plenty of our partners who have some hesitations about placing kids here in the US, I mean if you think about some of the things you see in the news, you know, it's we would, might think that that's crazy, but I think it's important reflection to think about how we're processing information, how we're thinking about, you know, what it might be like in another country and often times kind of making some of those assumptions without going after the information on the ground.

[00:24:29]: So, really a lot of what we're trying to do is make sure that through our partners we're accessing really child specific information so that we're not making decisions that are based on assumptions or perceptions or just not knowing. I mean, I think the other piece of that, too, is it doesn't come - I think it's important to remind - it doesn't, I mean, inherent bias is something that we all should be working on, but I do truly think it comes from a place of wanting to protect kids. We don't go into this field because we're apathetic about children and their well-being and so, I think it comes from a place of truly wanting to make sure that these kids who are in, who it is our responsibility to protect, are being

placed in the places that they can truly be safest and kind of have their needs met.

[00:25:25 ]: And so, there is perhaps part of that wanting to protect that when we're thinking about looking at family who may live very far away and in different time zones and speak a different language and be in a place where we've only heard really kind of crazy things about, that it's hard to imagine considering having that child move there. But, again, like I said we're never advocating for that as the best option, we're advocating that that be a consideration to include all family in those decisions.

**TOM OATES** [00:26:04]: So, when you've got, you know, an agency that let's say they do, let's say they are a little bit more, so they say, do their due diligence and find a relative in another country, if they're gonna take, like you mentioned at the very beginning an aunt who is stationed in Germany or a grandparent in Jamaica and they have a connection, they recognize there's a family connection somewhere, but then, the agency's like, well now what do we do. How do we, how do we make this connection happen - what are some of those resources that agencies may not realize are out there that could actually help them, you know, make this connection?

**ELAINE WEISMAN** [00:26:44]: Yeah, well, I would really like to think that our agency is the best resource, in part because as I mentioned, we've been doing this for 95 years and really the role we try and fill is not to be the expert in every country's child protection system and every, you know, thing related to that, but as a resource to connect system to system and make sure we're being child centered in the way that we do that. So, we do offer tons of specific services, people can look those on our website, [www.iss-usa.org](http://www.iss-usa.org), I mentioned a few of them earlier. But, I think importantly, you know, we are a non-profit organization and one of the things we really pride ourselves on is kind of some flexibility. And, a lot of what we do is provide technical assistance, like I said, in, you know, any time you have a case where there's an international aspect, we may not be able to provide a specific service, but there's a good chance we could at least connect people to some of the additional resources that could help them get there.

[00:28:03]: So, I certainly think that that's a space we as an organization hope to fill. I think some other important resources would be consulates and embassies. So, we are a social service organization, we are not, we are not immigration lawyers. We, as I said, cannot possibly be experts in the laws of each and every country where a child may be coming from or going to. And so, while we focus on a lot of the child centered work and the social service piece, consulates and embassies can be really, really helpful in helping caseworkers understand the nuances of each case, because, you know, I mentioned the case earlier of a child going to live with grandma in Jamaica may be very different from a child going from Maryland to an aunt in Germany on a US military base. So, we can't assume that those are all gonna be the same. Each case, as we know in child welfare, is unique and different and so, consulates and embassies can be really helpful in, kind of, in looking at some of those nuances.

[00:29:23]: And there are some, I believe, some states and counties that may have specific MOUs with particular consulates for services like family finding or things like that and so, we certainly encourage people to utilize those resources, kind of, concurrent to working on getting all of the social service pieces in place.

**TOM OATES** [00:29:49]: You know, you talked about the services that ISS USA provides and I wanna dive into that in a second, but before we move any further, I wanna, you know, talk to you about something that agencies will definitely have to deal with, but you hate to have to deal with it after the fact - the legal implications and those kind of legal rights and restrictions, so, you know, once that case pops up for somebody and they do wanna move forward, what should they be cognizant of, what should they be aware of when working on cross-border cases?

**ELAINE WEISMAN** [00:30:18]: Very good question. So, there are a few things, I think I mentioned a little bit this immigration piece. And those are some very important questions to answer off the bat. We in this country have our own set of immigration laws, each country has their own set of immigration laws, things can shift and move around, so again, kind of checking in with consulates about where things stand, that's really helpful. But, ways that workers can kind of start that process early is kind of determining eligibility for citizenship in another country, looking at, you know, for example, if you are pursuing placement in an aunt in Canada, that may look very different from the immigration possibilities of a grandparent or a non-custodial parent. So, kind of really looking at who, visa requirements for travelling for the child and the caregiver, eligibility for citizenship.

[00:31:25]: Another thing we run into quite a bit, I would say, is thinking about what the permanency goals are in the case. So, you mentioned earlier in the podcast how we relate to adoption and actually, we don't work on cases of international adoption, except in this kind of one niche way, which I can talk about. But, so, if the, if you're working on a case that is somebody who, a relative that is seeking to adopt one of their relatives, a relative child from the US, that has to go through a Hague accredited agency, which we are not. So, making sure that we're not starting a process that is actually meant to be something totally different. That can make the process more drawn out, it can be, it can put families in the position of having to go through much longer and kind of duplicative processes. So, being kind of clear and thinking through what permanency goals are is important.

[00:32:35]: And then, I think another piece that some people, I'm not sure how much people know about consular notification, but if a citizen, if a child enters your state child welfare system and has citizenship in another country, you should be notifying the consulate of that country. So, under the Federal Fostering Connections Law, a child's family must be notified that he or she is in custody within 30 days. Technically, there's no geographical limitation to where those take place, and so, we always advocate that that includes family in other countries. And so, really making sure that our responsibilities under Fostering Connections to notify are, are taking place. So those are some things I think people can start looking at from the beginning.

[00:33:40]: The other piece being that we know not all overseas relatives will be suitable placements, right. Some may, but we know that the connections for kids can be really, really, really important. Connections to family in their well-being in general and their identity formation, their connection to a sense of, kind of, identity and history and culture, even if the ultimate plan is not for that child to be placed permanently with a relative overseas, creating that connection can be really a valuable thing. We do home studies and assessments for the purpose of visitation and so, even if you're looking at just kind of some regular visits or things like that, you still have to look at immigration requirements, visas, who's gonna be traveling with the child and does that person have the right documentation to leave the



country and re-enter with the child, those kinds of things. So, again, these are all things that once we start working on a case, we would help, kind of, walk through some of the how to do that and other considerations even if we're not directly involved with the immigration piece.

**TOM OATES** [00:35:04]: You're leading me into right where we wanna go to, which I wanna spend some time, actually about, you know, ISS USA. And you've listed a number of them, but of those maybe you have not listed - talk to me about those services and the support that are able to provide, you know, cases that get referred to you.

**ELAINE WEISMAN** [00:35:22]: Sure. So, like I said, we have kind of a long list of services. I won't just start listing them, 'cause people will probably stop listening, so, I would recommend having people kind of check our website, but I will, there's a few, you know, home studies, background checks, document tracings are kind of run of the mill. We did develop a service a number of years ago called a community resource assessment and that is something that I like to describe as kind of a home study on a community. We actually developed it initially as part of a way for, or kind of through some programming for kids who are in removal proceedings, unaccompanied or undocumented kids who are in removal proceedings in the United States and the stakeholders, you know, the decision makers, attorneys and judges and social workers were looking for information about not necessarily the family, but what is the community where this kid is coming from and would be returned to.

[00:36:35]: And so, that service has kind of evolved to be a much more actionable service plan where rather than having a home study where somebody goes in and does all of the work in the home and with the family members and getting background, there's somebody who is also going into the community and kind of taking note of what resources are there along a number of categories from education and health resources and mental health resources and recreational opportunities and, you know, faith-based organizations and also what resources are not available. And part of that process is then also to document and identify specific resources that could be, kind of, mobilized in the case the child were to be returned to that community. So, what we like to do is recommend the home study and the community resource assessment to be done together so that you have the information about the family and the home but also, what are the resources that will really support a child in reconnecting to that community or connecting for the first time, in some cases.

[00:37:50]: And again, doing it in a way so that we're identifying those services in advance so it can be, kind of, activated as a service plan in the case that that child is placed. So, that's kind of a unique service that we have. The other thing is that, like I said, we are a small and flexible organization, so if we start getting a number of requests for a particular service, we like to not say no until we know we cannot provide that service. And so, we are, you know, always kind of on the lookout for what other needs are emerging and seeing if we can, in cooperation with our international partners work on some of those services.

[00:38:38]: And then, the other piece I'll add when we talk about cross-border, is, you know, for nearly 100 years of work we've been working primarily in international, cross-border work. But, we are able in some cases to provide inter-state services when there's a non-custodial parent in another state, we can provide some home studies in those cases. So, that's something new that, again, because we were

getting those requests, we realized, hey, actually, we can do this. So, we always like to say just ask and we'll, until we know we can't do it, we'll certainly look into it.

**TOM OATES** [00:39:19]: And of course these are, these are cases that are referred to you. So, it's a state agency, it's a county agency that then comes to ISS to say, hey, you know, here's what we're dealing with, you know, what, can you help? And so, while, you know, any agency like we said can work with ISS USA, there are differences and I want folks to understand - and so walk me through this - that ISS has contracts with various states, some of the states within the US and it doesn't limit only those states from working with you, but it does allow some streamlining. Talk to me about, you know, if you're in a state that has a contract - and I know you guys have that listed on your site, and we'll make sure we have a link to ISS USA on the web page for this episode - but, the difference between agencies in states that currently have a contract with ISS USA, what does that avail them?

**ELAINE WEISMAN** [00:40:19]: Sure, absolutely, so like you said, we take referrals and cases from anywhere in the United States and any of our partners internationally. We do have contracts with some states and really the easiest or the best answer of what the difference is its ease and quickness of services. So, if you have a contract with us, then as soon as we get that referral, we're able to open the case and assuming it's a service we can provide in a place we can provide it, we can start working on it. If you are in a state where we don't have a contract, you send basically the same referral to us and then we work with you to set up a scope of work agreement and contract and payment and all of that, we do everything in our power to make sure that's done very quickly, but I think the best way of talking about the value of a contract is that, is the quickness that we can get the case open.

[00:41:20]: The, I think it's also important to notice in terms of what's the difference, like I said before, the states with whom we have contracts are not states that necessarily have a higher rate or a higher number of families with or children with international family connections. I think that's a big myth we hopefully have debunked over the course of our conversation, but, so I think that's just as important to point out. But, we also can contract with individual agencies or counties but what people, I think the value of that contract is, once again, we offer training, each state may approach us with different needs or different kinds of concerns and what they're seeing in their own systems and so, again, as trying to be a flexible organization, we really work with the individual state and agency around what they see as they needs, we do usually a needs assessment, as well to make sure that we're responding to, kind of, what's coming up. So, we offer training and then have, once again, that connection, you know, we don't offer different levels of technical assistance to states, you know, places we have state contracts with and those we don't.

[00:42:42]: But, I think the best example I have is a contract that we've had with the State of New Jersey for many, many years and with them we probably, probably about a third, perhaps, of our outgoing cases - so cases of children who are in the United States who have a service need outside of the United States - about a third come from New Jersey. And that has been, again, not because New Jersey has way more kids in care with overseas family, but simply because over the course of having this contract, the workers there and supervisors and local offices have become so adept at asking that question to every single kid and really making that a core part of their services. And the fact that as soon, you know, as soon as there is a child who is identified, we get referrals for home studies, we get referrals for

community resource surveys, we get referrals for psychological evaluations and a lot of, kind of, this idea of okay well, if I can get a home study, I can get this, let's try and do this. And so, I think being really creative about thinking about the services that could help move a child towards permanency more quickly is something that we really work with everybody on to do. And so, again, the quickness that we're able to do that with is in large part because we have a contract with them that, you know, you just keep it moving, as we say.

**TOM OATES** [00:44:20]: Well, Elaine, before we wrap up and you may have already hinted to this, but I'd love to get your sense of the biggest takeaway that you'd wanna share with those caseworkers, those administrators and those who work in foster care and adoption, you know, about the challenges that they may face in trying to connect cross-border families.

**ELAINE WEISMAN** [00:44:43]: Yeah, the biggest takeaway, well, I hope you'll let me give like maybe, I'll give one or two?

**TOM OATES** [00:44:50]: I'm sorry, the biggest takeaways, alright.

**ELAINE WEISMAN** [00:44:53]: So, sure. I mean, I hope people listening have taken away that it is important and essential to ask every kid and not just one, but really keep that as a core part of the permanency planning process to kind of continue to engage whether with the child, his or her family, making sure it's not just the family that is local and speaks your language and is making themselves available, but is also really broadening that to make sure we're capturing family members overseas. And kind of trying to move away from this idea that these kids aren't in our states. I think the other piece is really about, you know, to be child-centered in the way that we're doing this work is about making informed decisions that are based on facts, rather than assumptions about other countries and other places and that you have the resources to do that. I think, like I said earlier, the, I think a lot of the barriers come from this fear of the unknown or the intimidation around doing something new or working in a place you've never worked before. We all, I mean, fear of change and fear of things that are new is something that is not unique to anybody.

[00:46:24]: And so, I think it's just important to think about that you don't have to have all of the answers getting into this. So, don't be afraid of what you're finding out. We certainly don't have all the answers, you know, in the palm of our hand, but I think that we, you just need to be making sure we're asking more questions and the right questions and that there are resources out there to keep this process moving forward so that we are moving kids towards permanency with family more quickly and that with as many, you know, we are in such a global society right now and connections to other countries is so much easier than it's ever been before, that really should translate into how we work with kids and families who are separated by borders. So, don't be scared and hopefully, give us a call if you have any questions we may be able to answer.

**TOM OATES** [00:47:35]: Elaine Weisman from ISS USA, thank you so much for your time and for sharing your insights here and joining us on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

**ELAINE WEISMAN** [00:47:44]: Thank you, Tom, so much, it's really been a pleasure to talk to you.

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast  
Connecting Cross-Border Families TRANSCRIPT

**TOM OATES** [00:47:50]: So if you head on over to this episode of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast – that’s on [www.Childwelfare.gov](http://www.Childwelfare.gov), we’ve posted a few links to some helpful information, including an Information Gateway publication Immigration and Child Welfare. We’ve also got a list of related organizations providing information on immigration and child welfare, we’ll point you to our selection of resources on intercountry adoption, as well. We’ll also give you links to the Office of Refugee and Resettlement, along with the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Consular Affairs, where you can find contact information for all the US Embassies and Consulates. If you are looking for other information to help you in your work surrounding or connected to child welfare, foster care, or adoption, please reach out to us at Child Welfare Information Gateway at [info@childwelfare.gov](mailto:info@childwelfare.gov), our Information Support Services team can help you with your research or finding the right laws and policies, or what other states or agencies may be doing to address similar issues or concerns you may have. So, thanks again to Elaine Weisman with ISS USA for helping shed some light on connecting cross-border families, and hey, thanks to you for being with us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. I’m Tom Oates – have a great day!

**FEMALE NARRATOR** [00:49:13]: Thanks for joining us for this edition of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Child Welfare Information Gateway is available at [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov) and is a service of the Children’s Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. The views and opinions expressed on this podcast do not necessarily reflect on those of Information Gateway, or the Children’s Bureau.