

Families celebrate Russian heritage, joy of adoption

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DALLAS—Eastern European culture came alive in Dallas at a recent gathering of adopted children and families celebrating their Russian roots.



Sarah Bull, 8, of Waco works on a craft project at a heritage gathering for Eastern European adoptive families. (PHOTOS/Dillon International)

Families explored Eastern European music, food, crafts and games at the annual Family Day event hosted by [Buckner](#) and [Dillon International](#).

"We attend because we want to keep her connected with her Russian heritage," said Chris McGough of Grand Prairie, whose daughter Ana was 12 years old when she joined their family last year via adoption from Russia. "She has a very strong Russian heritage, and we want to let her know that it is OK with us for her to maintain that heritage."

Parents also benefit from the fellowship, said Robin Fortner of Longview who attended the event with her son, Max, age 9.



A member of the Russian folk music group, Kalinka Duo, of Austin shows a guitar-like instrument, the balalaika, to Daniel Rhoads, 12, of Farmers Branch and Natalie Bull, 9, of Waco. The children attended a recent Eastern European Family Day in Dallas hosted by Buckner and Dillon International. (PHOTOS/Dillon International)

"It is wonderful being with other adoptive families and seeing how they are doing. We have such camaraderie," she said. "It was also great to hear from the older adoptees and to see how they embrace both their Russian and American cultures."

This year's Eastern European Family Day marked a special occasion for the Bull family. Natalie Bull, 9, and younger sister Sarah, 8, attended the heritage activities with their grandparents while parents Frank and Melinda of Waco travelled home from Russia with the newest member of the Bull family, 15-year-old Lisa.

"They were all friends in the orphanage, so they were already like sisters," Melinda said. The three girls were united when the Bulls arrived from the airport, joining them at the Buckner Adoption and Maternity Services office in Dallas, shortly after the event concluded.

"It was fun," Natalie said.



Natalie Bull, 9, of Waco enjoys celebrating her Russian heritage at a Buckner and Dillon International Eastern European Family Day gathering in Dallas. (PHOTOS/Dillon International)

The heritage celebration served as a reunion time for Natasha Votyakova, director of Buckner's program in Russia, who attended the gathering.

"It was wonderful to see all of the children and see how much they have done to realize their potential—so much more than they could have done in an orphanage," she said.

There is a great need for families interested in adopting older children from Russia, Votyakova added.

"So many older children get overlooked because they are not babies. These are smart, happy, healthy children," Melinda Bull said.

To learn more about adoption or Buckner's work to make life better for vulnerable children in Russia, please call (214) 319-3426 or visit www.beafamily.org.