**Pitt Contributes to Court’s Adoption Decision**

            Two University of Pittsburgh faculty members submitted an expert witness statement to the European Human Rights Court that contributed to its recent decision in favor of USA parents whose adoptions of Russian children were interrupted in progress in 2012 when Russia stopped all adoptions to the USA.

            The parents of 45 young children, many with various disabilities, claimed the adoption ban discriminated against them and their children.  Part of the case rested on the nature of the care and special services that those children were likely to receive by staying in Russian institutions vs. being adopted to families in the USA and having access to specialized services here.

            The expert witness statement was submitted to the court by Drs. Christina J. Groark and Robert B. McCall, Co-Directors of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development.  Groark is Associate Professor of Education and a specialist in the care and development of children with disabilities, and McCall is Professor of Psychology and a specialist in early childhood development and the consequences of early institutionalization.

            Both have spent more than 17 years studying, with Russian colleagues, children reared in orphanages in the Russian Federation, but also in China and Latin America. This group has more data than any other on the early development of institutionally reared children in Russia, many of whom have disabilities.

            Their statement covered the expected physical and mental development of children living in Russian institutions and the relative lack of appropriate services, treatment, and care for children with disabilities.  It also described what care would have been like had these children been adopted to the USA, including the range of special services routinely provided for those with disabilities, and how the physical, mental, and behavioral development of such children typically improves, often dramatically.

            The court agreed with the claim of discrimination and said Russia should compensate each pair of parents for damages and legal fees.

            This is not the first instance in which Groark and McCall’s work influenced policy in Russia.  Their intervention project, conducted with Russian colleagues, improved the care provided in Russian institutions for infants and young children.   Specifically, they made the institution more “family-like” with fewer more consistent caregivers and encouraged caregivers to behave more “parent-like” with the children.  These changes produced substantial physical and mental improvements in the children.  Subsequently, their Russian colleagues got the federal government to mandate many of the same changes in all institutions in the country.

            The Office of Child Development is devoted to bringing scholarship to practice and policy, and has conducted a great variety of similar projects in Pittsburgh over the last 30 years.