



A project of the Adoption Coalition of Texas and CASAs across Central Texas

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is a “Heart Gallery”?

A: “Heart Galleries” exist across the United States as photography exhibits that feature the faces of children who are living in foster care and are waiting to be adopted. The first Heart Gallery premiered in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in March 2001, as a project of the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department.

Q: What is The Heart Gallery of Central Texas?

A: The Heart Gallery of Central Texas is a traveling art exhibit using the talents of portrait and documentary photographers to capture the spirit and personalities of foster children waiting for their forever family. The Heart Gallery of Central Texas travel from city to city across Central Texas over an eight-month timeframe. It is also available online at www.heartgallerytexas.com.

Q: What is the goal of The Heart Gallery of Central Texas?

A: The goal is to find forever families for these children languishing in the foster care system. The Heart Gallery of Central Texas is a community awareness and recruitment project. It helps us to humanize these children, putting a face with an issue. These pictures show the personalities and characteristics of the kids and offer yet another perspective about each and every child.

Q: Who is responsible for The Heart Gallery of Central Texas?

A: The Heart Gallery of Central Texas is a project of the Adoption Coalition of Texas, a nonprofit collaboration of child placing agencies (Arrow Child and Family Ministries, Lutheran Social Services, Marywood Children and Families, and Pathways Youth and Family Services) and the State of Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Child Protective Services. The collective mission is to find forever families for children languishing in the foster care system. When the idea of starting a Heart Gallery in this region surfaced, it was only natural that it be a recruitment and community awareness project of the Adoption Coalition of Texas because the missions are the same – to find forever families for forgotten children. The Adoption Coalition of Texas is a small nonprofit which began in February 2004 with an annual operating budget of under \$150,000.

Q: How is The Heart Gallery of Central Texas funded?

A: The Heart Gallery of Central Texas is the financial responsibility of the Adoption Coalition of Texas and funds are sought from the community – businesses and individuals. With six months of planning, developing and framing and then eight months of traveling, this project is labor and material intensive. Each year prior to the unveiling, the Adoption Coalition of Texas seeks financial sponsors for that year’s project. While sponsorships account for less than 1/3 of the actual costs, the balance is funded through the Adoption Coalition of Texas’ general fund – monies derived from grants for the purpose of community awareness and recruitment. There continues to be a great need to fund existing and future efforts.

Q. What is considered Central Texas?

A. Central Texas is a 30 county area that includes Austin, Waco, Bryan, College Station, Killeen, Lampasas, Llano, San Saba and surrounding areas.

Q: Are all of the children in the Heart Gallery living in Austin or Central Texas?

A: No. The kids cases originated in Central Texas, however, the children can be living in shelters, foster homes or residential treatment centers throughout the state, depending on their needs and space availability.

Q: How did you select the photographers?

A: Actually, the photographers select us. Local photographers were so moved by a 2005 Parade Magazine news story about other Heart Galleries that they wanted to create one here in Central Texas. Since, more and more photographers have come forward to join the cause. Each and every photographer has embraced this project from a personal perspective that goes above and beyond simply photographing.

Q: How did you choose which children to photograph?

A: Every day in Central Texas there are approximately 700 kids waiting for adoption. Child Protective Services (CPS) case workers, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), case workers with Child Placing Agencies (CPA), foster families and volunteers throughout Central Texas identify and recommend kids for the project. We try to include as many kids as logistically and financially possible. We do try very hard to include kids who are older and at risk for aging out of the system, but yet still want that elusive forever family. Each year, over 140 kids are featured in The Heart Gallery of Central Texas.

Q: Is this a state-funded program?

A: No.

Q: What other organizations and people are supporters of this project?

A: First and foremost, we have the Texas Documentary Photographers and portrait photographers and then general photographers. Without photographers, we would have no project. Secondly, we have the partners of the Adoption Coalition of Texas (The Arrow Project, Child Protective Services, Homes4Good, Lutheran Social Services, Marywood Children and Families and Pathways Youth and Family Services). All of the kids are in Child Protective Services care. Without the help of the kids' adoption and conservator case workers, we would not be able to coordinate this project as the state is the parent for all of the kids. We have an honorary committee that consists of The Honorable Steve Ogden (Senate District 5), the Honorable W. Jeanne Meurer (98th Judicial District Civil Court, Retired), Olga Campos (KVUE), Amy Hadley (TV Host/Producer), Shawn Rutherford (KXAN), Gary Walsh (102.3 The River) and Lytle Pressley (Owner of Spazio).

CASA partners help us identify children who are waiting, but we are also able to bring in more advocates for the kids themselves who can help transport and coordinate, and ultimately, help with necessary information as families come into the system to adopt. The depth of this project and adoption process itself has been significantly expanded because of the involvement of the following CASA organizations:

CASA of Bastrop, Lee and Fayette Counties
CASA of Central Texas
CASA for the Highland Lakes Area
CASA of McLennan and Hill Counties
CASA of Travis County
Voices for Children, CASA of Brazos Valley

We are fortunate that many people care about these kids and this project.

Q: Where can I find more information about The Heart Gallery of Central Texas, becoming a sponsor, the adoption process or learning more about kids?

A: You can go to www.heartgallerytexas.com or contact the Adoption Coalition of Texas at 512-301-2825, www.adoptioncoalitiontx.org or tracyeilers@adoptioncoalitiontx.org.

Q: How much does it cost to adopt from the foster care system?

A: There are no fees to adopt from the foster care system. In addition, you do not need to be married to adopt nor do you do not need to own your own home. You need to be able to offer love, stability and safety!