



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

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**Foster Children Awaiting Adoption in Central Texas to be Featured in Special Photo Exhibit –
Program Reflects Overwhelming Adoption Success Rate**

The Heart Gallery of Central Texas Photo Exhibit Premiere and Gala to be held September 6th

(Austin, Texas – August 20, 2007) - The unique photo exhibit which features foster children waiting to be adopted, the Heart Gallery of Central Texas, has captured the hearts of the Central Texas community. In the last two years, from the public exposure and community education of this heartwarming event, over 60% of the children in the portraits have been adopted and placed with a forever family. Due to the overwhelming national interest and its local success in recent years, The Heart Gallery of Central Texas photography exhibit will unveil for the third year at its Premiere Gala on September 6, 2007 at 6:30 p.m. at SPAZIO by Lytle Pressley in Austin, Texas.

The Heart Gallery of Central Texas is both a traveling portrait exhibit and innovative approach to community outreach, and a unique opportunity for individuals to learn more about children in the foster care system and the adoption process. The exhibit is made possible by over 50 Central Texas documentary and portrait photographers who volunteered their time and talents to capture the characteristics and individual personalities of more than 120 children (in 100 portraits) waiting for adoption, in hopes that their work will inspire others to open their hearts and consider adopting. The photography exhibit not only shows the variety in age and ethnicity of children and sibling groups awaiting adoption, but also displays the diverse group of people who are providing a forever family for these children. At any given moment, there are 500 children waiting for adoption in the Central Texas foster care system, all removed from their natural family due to abuse or neglect. The Heart Gallery process helps break down common misconceptions regarding adoption and promotes that if you can provide a safe and loving home for a child, whether you are a single individual or if you do not own a home, you can adopt.

The photo exhibit and gala will be held on Thursday, September 6, 2007 at SPAZIO by Lytle Pressley, 1214 W. 6th Street, Austin, Texas at 6:30 p.m. Tickets are \$25 per person and proceeds benefit The Heart Gallery of Central Texas. The exhibit will be on display at SPAZIO from September 6 - 20, and then travel around Central Texas for the next eight months. This is a project of the Adoption Coalition of Texas, in partnership with six CASA organizations across Central Texas. The Adoption Coalition of Texas is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization created in 2003 to focus on finding forever families for children languishing in the foster care system.

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Dr. Tracy Eilers, Chair for the Heart Gallery of Central Texas and the Executive Director for the Adoption Coalition of Texas states, "It's extraordinary to know that in just the two years of the Heart Gallery program, over 60% of the children featured in portraits were adopted. This remarkable rate of success proves this effort has been effective in raising awareness for the kids and the Central Texas foster care system overall. Every year after the debut, we receive thousands of phone calls and emails from all over the country and we want that to keep happening."

"Seeing these children in photographs as they laugh and play is a very powerful experience. We want to inspire people to learn more about adopting from the foster care system. Our whole purpose is to humanize these children, display their personalities, and give a glimpse into their souls," explains Eilers.

Without the dedication and commitment of the photographers, the photo exhibit would not happen. These outstanding photographers take out time from their businesses to travel around Central Texas and photograph these kids. There are endless heartwarming stories of the passion and the lengths that these photographers have gone through to get the photos taken so that they can capture the heart and soul of the child in their work. Nancy Krueger, a third year photographer for the Heart Gallery commented, "we have to try to portray the kids both for the young people that they are and also allow them to reach out through the portrait and touch the soul of that special family that is needing them. What the public doesn't know is how attached we become to them through their photographs, as we hope that the picture that we chose on their behalf will be the one that helps them achieve their goal of a forever family."

There are an estimated 523,000 children in foster care in the United States, and more than 150,000 of them are waiting to be adopted. In Central Texas alone, there is a daily average of 3,700 children in foster care with 500 waiting for adoption into a permanent home. Since 1987, the number of children in foster care has nearly doubled, and the average time a child remains in foster care has lengthened to nearly three years. Each year, approximately 20,000 children in foster care will age out of the system without ever being placed with a permanent family according to the *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children; Interim Estimates for FY 2003*.

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About the Adoption Coalition of Texas:

The Adoption Coalition of Texas (ACT) is a coalition of Child Protective Services and nonprofit child placing agencies whose mission is to find families for children languishing in the foster care system. This is accomplished through community awareness and education about kids in foster care, recruitment of families, and systemic change with the goal of ultimately increasing the number of kids who get adopted. The Adoption Coalition of Texas partner agencies include: The Arrow Project, Child Placement Center, Lutheran Social Services of the South, Marywood Children Family Services, Pathways Youth and Family Services, and Child Protective Services. The Heart Gallery of Central Texas is one of its several recruitment projects. These children are living in foster care, many for extended periods, and are waiting for a permanent family – a life of stability and love. If you would like more information on the Adoption Coalition of Texas, The Heart Gallery of Central Texas, or to find out ways to help, visit www.adoptioncoalitiontx.org, www.heartgallerytexas.com, or call Dr. Tracy Eilers at 512-301-2825. The Adoption Coalition of Texas operates as a special 501(c)3 project of the Austin Community Foundation.