



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” are emerging 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 will travel from city to city across Central Texas over an 8-month timeframe. This year’s exhibit will conclude at the Texas State Capitol April 16-20, 2007.

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 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. In 2005, The Heart Gallery of Central Texas helped with the adoption of 45% of the kids. Over 1,000 phone calls were received about children from all across the country. In September 2006, the 2nd Heart Gallery of Central Texas was unveiled. In less than 2 months, more than 1,200 calls were received about the kids and several are in the process of being adopted. This project works because it causes people to take notice.

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 and 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 Region 7 surfaced, it was only natural that it be a recruitment and community awareness project of the Adoption Coalition of Texas because these missions are the same. The Adoption Coalition of Texas is a small nonprofit, almost 3 years into operation. The organization currently operates on an annual budget of less than \$110,000 per year.

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. In both 2005 and 2006, the Adoption Coalition of Texas sought project sponsorship and ticket sales to augment the financial needs of the project, bringing in about 1/3 of the projects costs. The balance of the project was 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, Killeen, Lampasas, Llano 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 selected themselves. Local photographers were so moved by a 2005 *Parade* magazine news story about other Heart Galleries that they wanted to create one in Central Texas. The 2006 Heart Gallery of Central Texas had 45 photographers shooting for this project. 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 500 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. As many kids as logistically and financially possible are included and every effort is made to include those who are older and at risk for aging out of the system, but yet still want that elusive forever family. This year, there are 140 kids featured in 95 portraits.

Q: Is this a state-sponsored program?

A: No.

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

A: First and foremost, there are the Texas Documentary Photographers and portrait photographers and then general photographers. Without photographers, there would be no project. Secondly, there are the partners of the Adoption Coalition of Texas (The Arrow Project, Child Protective Services, Lutheran Social Services, Marywood Children and Families and Pathways Youth and Family Services). All of the kids are in care of Child Protective Services. Without the help of the kids' adoption and conservator case workers, it would not be possible to coordinate this project as the state is the parent for all of the kids. There is also an honorary committee that consists of Olga Campos with KVUE, Amy Hadley with News 8 Austin, Lytle Pressley, owner of SPAZIO and Richard Slaughter, Executive Director of the Austin Community Foundation.

In 2006, the community partners (from just CASA of Travis County) were expanded to include 5 additional CASA organizations across Central Texas which has proven a huge asset to this project. Not only does this help identify children who are waiting, but also provides the ability to bring in more advocates for the kids themselves. Advocates who can transport, 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

It is 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 need to own a home. You *do* need to be able to offer love, stability and safety!