



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

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## **Permanent Adoptions for Foster Children in Central Texas Increase with Help of Unique Photo Exhibit**

### ***The Heart Gallery of Central Texas Photo Exhibit Premiere and Gala to be held September 18<sup>th</sup>***

(Austin, Texas – August 25, 2008) - With the help of special programs like the Heart Gallery of Central Texas, permanent adoptions for foster children in Central Texas continue to increase every year. The Heart Gallery is a unique photo exhibit which features foster children waiting to be adopted, and has resulted in over 60% of the children in the portraits being placed with a forever family in a permanent home. Since the Heart Gallery debuted four years ago, the public exposure and community education of this heartwarming project has helped many children in Central Texas find a special family. With national recognition and enormous support from the community, the Heart Gallery of Central Texas photography exhibit will again unveil for the fourth year with its Premiere Gala on September 18, 2008 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 unique approach to community outreach, and a special opportunity for individuals to learn more about children in the foster care system and the adoption process. The exhibit is made possible by over 59 Central Texas documentary and portrait photographers who volunteered their time and talents to capture the characteristics and individual personalities of more than 126 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 also helps show the variety in age and ethnicity of children, sibling groups awaiting adoption, and harder to place older children that need families. At any given moment, there are almost 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 helps educate the public about adoption and children available in their area, and helps break down common misconceptions regarding adoption. Education on the facts about adoption is also key. You must be able to provide a safe and loving home, but you do not have to be married and can be a single adult, and you can rent and do not have to own a home.

The photo exhibit and Heart Gallery Gala will be held on Thursday, September 18, 2008 at SPAZIO by Lytle Pressley, 1214 W. 6<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> through October 4<sup>th</sup>, 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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“The interest from this project is truly inspiring. When The Heart Gallery of Central Texas first debuted in 2005, we hoped it would open a few hearts and homes in the greater Central Texas area. Little did we know that this very project would have a national impact, bringing together children and their forever families from across the country. The success is unquestionable,” said Dr. Tracy Eilers, Chair for the Heart Gallery of Central Texas and the Executive Director for the Adoption Coalition of Texas. “Our talented photographers help capture that special sparkle and personality of the children which is reflected into these portraits. This process helps humanize the children and inspires people to learn more about adopting from the foster care system.

Without the dedication and commitment of the photographers who donate their time, the photo exhibit would not happen. These outstanding photographers take out time from their businesses to travel around Texas and photograph these kids in a variety of settings. 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.

There are an estimated 513,000 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 approximately 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, Homes4Good, 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](http://www.adoptioncoalitiontx.org), [www.heartgallerytexas.com](http://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.