



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY
Your Partner For A Stronger Arizona

News Release

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DES Launches The Children's Heart Gallery at a Phoenix Event

Photojournalism project to find adoptive families for children in foster care

PHOENIX – The Department of Economic Security will launch a new project this weekend to raise awareness of the need for foster and adoptive families across the state. With the consent of the Heart Gallery of America, Inc., the project, known as the Children's Heart Gallery, will develop a traveling multi-media exhibit dedicated to finding adoptive homes, or 'forever families,' for children currently in foster care in Arizona.

The Children's Heart Gallery hopes to create photo profiles for at least 75 children who are currently in the Arizona foster care system and who have a case plan goal of adoption with no identified placement. The children will be featured in Heart Gallery exhibits throughout Arizona.

"This new project brings together community volunteers and businesses who are partnering with DES with the ultimate goal of finding these very deserving children new forever homes," said Director Clarence Carter. "It takes the entire community to come together to help these children. The folks who are coming out this weekend are prime examples of how everyone can play a role. We sincerely appreciate the support and dedication our volunteers are giving to the Children's Heart Gallery project."

The first part of the project will take place from 9:00 a.m. to dusk on Saturday, September 29, 2012, at the Arizona Biltmore Resort. A dozen children in foster care from the Phoenix metro area, ages seven to 17, will be professionally styled and photographed by volunteer professionals to be featured in the project.

The concept of a Heart Gallery was first developed in New Mexico and now operates nationwide under the name, the Heart Gallery of America. Currently more than 120 Heart Galleries are placed in communities throughout the United States. A Heart Gallery heightens the visibility of children in foster care awaiting families—the 'waiting children'—by featuring them in a traveling multi-media exhibit. The project harnesses the power of photography to capture each child's unique spirit and story in a profile. The photojournalistic profiles are featured in exhibits online, art galleries, and in larger public forums like airports and malls. With the aid and support of the media and the public, Heart Galleries all across America continue to assist child advocates with finding homes for hundreds of children in foster care each year.

The most recent DES reports show the number of Arizona children in foster care as of March 31, 2012, has risen to 12,453. Children range in age from birth to 18, and the majority of them – 4,313 kids to be exact (34.7 percent) – are 5 years of age or younger. The next largest group in out-of-home care is the

13-17 year olds -- over 3,000 teen-aged children in Arizona currently need foster care. Sadly, more than half the children ages 16-18 are not currently residing with a family. They are also the least adopted age group of all children in Arizona's foster care system.

To learn more about Arizona's foster care needs, please visit www.azkidsneedu.gov or call 1-877-Kids-NeedU (1-877-543-7633). To volunteer or to donate to the program, please contact Regina Weiler, DES Volunteer Program Administrator at 602-542-7957 or email her at Rweiler@azdes.gov.

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