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Ford Supports Heart Gallery's Effort to Help Foster Kids Find 'Forever Families'
By Kristopher Spencer

DEARBORN, July 15, 2005 (FCN) -- Call it a phenomenon, because the Heart Gallery movement has -- in a very short time -- touched thousands of lives and promises to touch even more.

Ford Motor Company's New York Community Relations Council recently made a charitable contribution to the Heart Gallery of New Jersey, one of approximately 60 non-profit Heart Gallery groups across 45 states. The goal of the Heart Gallery groups is to promote adoption of foster children by loving families -- forever families, as foster kids sometimes call them -- with the aid of portrait photography.

"We were very impressed by the creative approach of the Heart Gallery," said Bill Collins, New York Region Public Affairs manager, Ford Motor Company. "They've really shown the humanity of these wonderful kids through this exhibit, which raised awareness of the important need for adoption."



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AXZ AXZ



Name:
Anyaa

Birthdate:
02/1997

Photographer:
© 2005 Emily Wilson

**For more information
please call**

1-800-99-ADOPT

*Please mention the child,
the month/year and Heart
Gallery website when calling.

Heart Gallery groups promote adoption by staging exhibits that feature unique portraits of foster children by professional photographers. The Heart Gallery of New Jersey enlisted the creative help of 150 of the world's finest photojournalists and portrait photographers to capture the personalities of more than 300 New Jersey children who are eligible for adoption nationwide.

Inspired by an article in Parade magazine about the Heart Gallery of New Mexico, photojournalist Najlah Feanny Hicks of Clifton, N.J., immediately saw the potential for the project and approached the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) about starting a local Heart Gallery group. Feanny Hicks reached out to the photography community for volunteers and 150 from such publications as People, Newsweek, Time, Fortune, Rolling Stone, the New Yorker, Sports Illustrated and National Geographic rose to the occasion.

"As photographers, we've spent our adult lives documenting history, and often we've had only one degree of separation from tragedy," Hicks said. "Maybe this is our way of changing history for tens of thousands of kids

who, due to no fault of their own, are living with tragedy. It's not too late for them. They're not all damaged beyond repair."



Name:
Curtis

Birthdate:
04/1997

Photographer:
© 2005 Andrea Stern

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please call**

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Gallery website when calling.

The Heart Gallery of New Jersey premiered online in March (www.heartgallerynj.com). The actual photo exhibit has shown at the Liberty Science Center in Jersey City, and will visit other venues including the Cherry Hill Public Library, Newark Airport, the New Jersey State Aquarium in Camden, and the New Jersey State House.

According to the DYFS, there was a 468 percent increase in adoption inquiries in June of this year over June 2004, with 307 of the 460 total inquiries attributed to the Heart Gallery of New Jersey. Since the Heart Gallery started in New Jersey this spring, half of all 1,002 inquiries are attributed to the local group.



Name:
Ashley

Birthdate:
08/1992

Photographer:
© 2005 Bob Karp

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please call**

1-800-99-ADOPT

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How Hope Flowered in the Desert

The Heart Gallery movement started in New Mexico when Diane Granito, the recruitment event coordinator at New Mexico's Children, Youth & Families Department, took the suggestion of Santa Fe photographer Cathy Maier Callanan to exhibit portraits of foster children who are available for adoption. Granito founded the first Heart Gallery in 2001, mounting an exhibit at the prestigious Gerald Peters Gallery in Santa Fe. The concept flowered and other Heart Gallery groups sprouted in cities and states, mounting similar exhibits in a variety of public venues.

"Heart Gallery photos aren't your run-of-the-mill portraits where you slick the kid's hair back and sit them in front of a fake background," said Granito. "Heart Gallery groups are a conduit for the positive energy of thousands of people around the country who want to make a real difference in the lives of

foster children.”

The movement took off this year when Granito received 600 e-mails from people who read the Parade article about the Heart Gallery of New Mexico published in January. Like Hicks, many of the letter writers expressed a strong interest in starting Heart Gallery groups in other states. With dozens of Heart Gallery groups starting around the country, interest is still growing.

Granito and her advisory committee teamed up with AdoptUSKids to stage a national incarnation named Heart Gallery USA. The event, which will open in Union Station in Washington, D.C., in November, will exhibit hundreds of portraits of adoptable children from around the United States.

“Heart Gallery groups are making more people aware that these kids exist,” said Rebecca Jones Gaston, the national recruitment campaign manager, AdoptUSKids. “The photos go a long way to showing that they aren’t just statistics but real human beings.”

For more information about the Heart Gallery groups, visit www.adoptuskids.org.

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