

Heart Gallery NYC



Heart Gallery NYC ■ Gracie Station ■ P.O. Box 606 ■ New York, NY 10028 ■ 212 965-8699

KEY FACTS

- The mission of Heart Gallery, NYC is to enable children living in foster care to realize their dreams of finding permanent, loving adoptive families to call their own, and to raise awareness and educate the public about the hundreds of children who desperately need and deserve the shelter and love of forever homes.
- Heart Gallery, NYC works with award-winning photographers who volunteer their talents by shooting portraits that showcase each child's unique qualities. The photographs are displayed in traveling gallery exhibits and via the Web, in the hope that prospective parents will be moved to open their hearts and homes to adopt the children.
- Heart Gallery, NYC is working in association with the New York City Administration for Children's Services to facilitate finding "forever homes" for the area's hard-to-place children, such as those who are older or in sibling groups.
- There are nearly 17,000 children living in foster care in New York City, hundreds are legally freed for adoption and are awaiting permanent homes.
- The Heart Gallery was originally founded in New Mexico in 2001 as a local adoption program by the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department.
- In January 2005, a Parade magazine article about the project by Santa Fe reporter Rosemary Zibart touched the hearts of millions of readers, resulting in a virtual explosion of Heart Gallery groups across America, where 118,000 foster children were waiting to be adopted. Later coverage included People magazine, Today Show, The View, CNN, MSNBC, USA Weekend, New York Times, ABC World News Tonight, 20/20 and many others. There are currently over 100 Heart Gallery groups throughout the nation.
- Six of these Heart Gallery groups alone have resulted in adoptive placements for nearly 500 children. In Connecticut, homes were found for 19 children after the first exhibit of 40 photographs was featured in a November 2003 supplement of the Hartford Courant. Ten children featured in the Tampa, Florida Heart Gallery have finalized adoptions. Currently 45 states have held or are planning Heart Gallery openings, and the number of Heart Gallery-inspired placements is in the thousands.
- The federal Children's Bureau's adoption initiative "The Collaboration to Adopt US Kids", has been a strong supporter of the project, and has named the Heart Gallery a "best practice". On November 1, 2005, they hosted the first National Heart Gallery exhibit at Union Station in Washington DC.
- Rush Philanthropic Arts Foundation, founded by hip-hop impresarios Russell, Danny, and Joey Simmons, has collaborated with Heart Gallery, NYC by providing venue space, and arts workshops through their education department.
- Heart Gallery, NYC strives to make each photo session a special, fun experience for the children. Photo shoots have included on-site art workshops, visits to parks and museums, horseback riding lessons and special gifts such as Phat Farm clothing donated by the fashion house.
- Heart Gallery NYC has been traveling throughout the five boroughs, and has raised awareness of the needs of foster children to millions, generated thousands of referrals from prospective adoptive parents and been directly responsible for finding "forever families" for youth over the age of 17.



www.heartgallerynyc.org

Office of the Mayor

CITY OF NEW YORK



Proclamation

WHEREAS: IN NEW YORK CITY AND THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES, FAR TOO MANY CHILDREN LIVE WITHOUT PARENTS' VITAL GUIDANCE AND CARE. NEARLY 17,000 YOUNG NEW YORKERS LIVE IN FOSTER CARE. HUNDREDS OF THEM ARE LEGALLY FREED FOR ADOPTION AND WAITING FOR PERMANENT, LOVING HOMES. TONIGHT, NEW YORK WELCOMES HEART GALLERY NYC, WHICH TAKES AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO CONNECTING CHILDREN WITH POTENTIAL PARENTS.

WHEREAS: WORKING IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE NEW YORK CITY ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, HEART GALLERY ASSISTS SOME OF THE AREA'S CHILDREN WHO HAVE HAD THE MOST DIFFICULTY FINDING FAMILIES – BECAUSE THEY ARE OLDER OR IN SIBLING GROUPS – BY ALLOWING WORLD-CLASS PHOTOGRAPHERS TO CAPTURE THE INDIVIDUALITY AND SPIRIT THAT MAKE ALL CHILDREN SUCH PRICELESS PARTS OF THEIR FAMILIES. SINCE 2001, HEART GALLERIES HAVE ALREADY PROVEN SUCCESSFUL IN 45 STATES, WHERE THEY HAVE BEEN HELPING TO FIND LOVING FAMILIES FOR HUNDREDS OF CHILDREN. WE BELIEVE THAT, ONCE THEY SEE THESE PHOTOGRAPHS, MORE NEW YORKERS WILL BE INSPIRED TO OPEN THEIR HEARTS AND HOMES THROUGH ADOPTION.

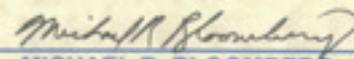
WHEREAS: JASON – A TALENTED ARTIST WHO HOPES THAT HEART GALLERY NYC WILL HELP HIM FIND A HOME – SAYS THAT “A FAMILY IS MADE UP OF PEOPLE WHO HELP EACH OTHER THROUGH HARD TIMES AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER FOR WHO THEY ARE.” EVERY YOUNG PERSON SHOULD ENJOY THE SUPPORT OF A LOVING FAMILY, AND I COMMEND ALL THOSE WHO HAVE WORKED TO MAKE THIS EXHIBIT POSSIBLE. THEIR DEDICATION TRULY REPRESENTS THE VERY BEST OUR GREAT CITY HAS TO OFFER.

NOW THEREFORE, I, MICHAEL R. BLOOMBERG, MAYOR OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK, IN RECOGNITION OF THIS IMPORTANT EVENT, DO HEREBY PROCLAIM TUESDAY, JULY 31ST, 2007 IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK AS:

“HEART GALLERY NYC DAY”



IN WITNESS WHEREOF I HAVE HEREUNTO SET MY HAND AND CAUSED THE SEAL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK TO BE AFFIXED.


MICHAEL R. BLOOMBERG
MAYOR



Heart Gallery Exhibits Share Foster Possibilities

Photography Exhibits Help Foster Children Find Families

By BOB BROWN

June 1, 2006 — - Sometimes a lens sees things that people miss. Sometimes it sees the subtle beauty in landscapes that would have vanished in a second through a car window. Sometimes it sees possibilities that otherwise might have gone unnoticed.

Through her lens, photographer Jackie Mathey saw possibilities in the form of a 10-year-old girl.

She was photographing Faye, who had lived in five foster-care homes. For most of the session, Faye was active and playful. The photo that most appealed to Mathey, though, was one in which the girl showed a reflective, solemn side.

"She did not show that side of herself to me until the second that I took that one picture," Mathey said. "But I chose that one because it showed her inner strength and her dignity and a really strong character that you sensed in her right away."

Through new collections of children's portraits in a project known as the Heart Gallery, tens of thousands of people have sensed the same range of possibilities that Mathey has seen.

In cities throughout America, art galleries and public spaces have mounted stunning exhibitions taken by some of the world's most famous photographers. The photographers work for free, using their talents to bring out qualities that otherwise might have gone undiscovered in children who are in foster care, hoping to be adopted by a family.

Mathey, who lives in Santa Fe, N.M., was one of those photographers.

"It softens you up inside. ... And it humbles you because you take for granted, what you have," Mathey said.

Santa Fe Exhibit Grows Into National Movement

The project has gained so much momentum that its founder prefers to describe it as a movement.

The idea originated five years ago in Santa Fe, where a local photographer suggested it to Diane Granito of the New Mexico Youth and Families Department.

Space was donated by the prestigious Gerald Peters Gallery in Santa Fe, which continues to host exhibits. Because older children are the most difficult to place with adoptive families, they are the focus of what the exhibits are about: improving the rate of adoption by humanizing the children and inviting prospective parents to view the results.

Before the Heart Gallery, the file photos of foster-care children were often compared to mug shots.

"All children are supposed to have a photograph in their file," Granito said. "And the photographs are the kind that you might get taken at school, where the child has his or her hair slicked back, and they're cropped in front of a fake backdrop. It doesn't express the individuality of the child at all. They're almost interchangeable."

Granito said that Heart Gallery exhibits created an immediate impact "when you walk into a room, and see dozens of children looking out at you. But the real magic happens when people take the time to stop and look into the eyes of each child, and stand there, talk with the child's social worker a little bit about the child, and actually apply to adopt the child -- because of the connection they felt with this portrait."

There are more than 80 Heart Gallery organizations in 40 states. In some places, the adoption rate after an exhibit is more than double the nationwide rate of adoption from foster care.

Bonding With Kids, Boosting Adoption Inquiries

Najlah Feanny, a photojournalist who helped assemble a who's who of photography for the New Jersey Heart Gallery, said, "I was stunned at the emotional level of some of these children having just met a photographer and an hour later saying, 'Please don't leave me.' One little girl said, 'This is the best day of my life.'"

"The thing that changed me the most," said Martin Schoeller, a well-known portrait photographer, "is to see these kids really trying so hard to find parents."

Erica Berger, who shoots celebrities for People Magazine, said, "I think the most important thing for me when I was working with them was to try to figure out very quickly what their mood was and then go with that."

After a Heart Gallery exhibit in New Jersey in August 2005, the state's Division of Youth and Family Services said it had experienced a 280 percent increase in adoption inquiries -- with approximately 2,300 of 3,000 inquiries attributed to the Heart Gallery.

Nationwide, out of the half-million children in foster care, nearly 118,000 are available for adoption.

"If every child waiting in the foster-care system was photographed for the Heart Gallery and people dedicated just one minute to each portrait, it would take 82 days to view them," Granito said.

Finding a Daughter in a Photograph

There is a term for foster-care children who never find a family. It's called "aging out." Children who aren't adopted by the age of 18 are released into the world, to do the best they can.

After photographing Faye for a Santa Fe Heart Gallery exhibit in 2002, Mathey remembers driving home with the friend who had volunteered as a stylist on the photo shoots.

"Something changed inside of me," Mathey said. "I knew, and I think even my stylist knew. We didn't say anything for about half the drive home. ... Then we started crying."

Mathey's husband, Courtenay, also knew that she had been deeply affected. The couple have a teenage

son Jackson. They had discussed adopting a child, but never as seriously as they did following Jackie's photo session with Faye.

"It was like, a little bell goes off and then it keeps getting louder and louder," Courtenay Mathey said. "We had conversations that night about pursuing [adoption] and knowing that we'd have to get training, and not knowing if we were really ready to commit."

Within a few months, they were fully committed. Today, the portrait of Faye that hung in the Santa Fe Heart Gallery exhibit hangs in her own room -- in the Mathey house, where she moved in March 2003. Her adoption was formalized in October 2003. She will be 14 on June 18.

In November 2005, the entire Mathey family traveled to Washington for a national event to promote the Heart Gallery.

"When I photographed Faye, it was a completely life-changing moment," Jackie Mathey told a large crowd.

As the movement has spread, so have the results. Granito estimates that by the end of 2006, 1,000 children will have been placed in families directly as a result of the Heart Gallery exhibits.

To those who express concern that the Heart Gallery appears to use marketing techniques to place children in adoptive homes, Granito said, "That's an understandable concern. But my take on the Heart Gallery is that it's not marketing children, it's marketing the idea of adopting from foster care."

No one pretends such adoptions are easy. When adoptions involve an older child, parents and child often wind up testing each other through a period of adjustment.

For the child, one key to adjusting is coming to believe that he or she won't be moved again, that the new family is there for life.

"I don't have to worry about seeing other people that I don't know -- knowing that my parents are there," Faye said. "And I will always wake up to the same place and in my own bed."

"Since it's been almost three years now, it's easier to see how time changes things," Courtenay Mathey said. "And to see that she has that belief now growing in her that, 'Well, I am here. This is my home, and I can lay down on the couch and I can play with the dog and I can have a warm place to sleep.' It's just lots of confidence and happiness that lets her be a kid."

To find out more about adopting a child from foster care, please visit www.adoptuskids.org. To find out more about how you can support the Heart Gallery please e-mail Diane Granito at dianeg.granito@state.nm.us. " dianeg.granito@state.nm.us.

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