

For Immediate Release
Marques
September 4, 2008

Contact: Ivette
850.222.1996

NEWS

Governor's "Explore Adoption" Initiative and Florida's Heart Gallery unveil photography exhibit

~Explore the public adoption option through the faces and stories of Florida's children~

Tallahassee- The Governor's Office of Adoption and Child Protection and the Heart Gallery of Florida unveiled a new photography exhibit featuring photos of children available for adoption across the state. This first-ever statewide exhibit is part of the Governor's "Explore Adoption" initiative, which aims to find permanent homes for Florida's children in care.

All 14 Heart Galleries from around the state are represented in the exhibit. The Florida Heart Gallery exhibit opened August 26 at the Mary Brogan Museum of Art and Science (MOAS) and will remain on display through September 8 thanks to the generosity of museum CEO Chucha Barber and members of the MOAS board.

"Through the extraordinary efforts of Governor Charlie Crist, Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp, our community-based care lead agencies and Floridians who open their hearts and homes, we will see more of Florida's children in care find permanent and loving families," said Florida's Chief Child Advocate Jim Kallinger. "The state of Florida is extremely fortunate to have 14 truly amazing Heart Galleries working together to find forever homes for our children."

The "Explore Adoption" campaign features children who wait the longest for homes - older children and teens, sibling groups and children with disabilities. Through public education, expanded partnerships, Web-based outreach and a mass media campaign, "Explore Adoption" invites Floridians to find out more about the children immediately available for adoption right in their home state.

"Florida's Heart Galleries provide a wonderful way to show off the special children available for adoption right in our backyard," said Jesse Miller, Heart Gallery of Florida. "The kids are so proud to have their photos taken by our talented photographers, and potential families can view a little piece of their spirit. The image captures their hearts in a way no other gallery can."

The Heart Galleries work with agencies and professional photographers in their areas help find homes for specific

children by creating compelling, personal portraits that capture the children's unique personalities and interests. Florida leads the nation in the development of Heart Galleries. For the past five years, Heart Gallery programs have accounted for unprecedented success achieved in finding loving, permanent homes for Florida's children in care.

Additionally, The Florida Heart Gallery is committed to creating a Tallahassee Heart Gallery, featuring local children who are available for adoption. Today, several photos of Big Bend children, taken by local professional photographer, Martin Gudz, were added to the statewide exhibit. The Florida Heart Gallery also announced that it is seeking committed members of the community to serve on a Tallahassee Heart Gallery advisory council.

The event included comments by adoptive parent Tarah Powell. While helping other children find homes by working at the Tampa Heart Gallery, she recognized her niece's picture, discovering she was in state care.

"I knew when I saw that picture I had to bring her into my home and give her the family she deserved," said Powell.

In the two months since "*Explore Adoption*" launched, the state's adoption hotline, 1-800-96-ADOPT, has received a record number of calls. The campaign includes television and radio spots that are airing statewide in English and Spanish and a 30-minute television special featuring the stories of three Florida families. The program is now airing statewide on network affiliate and cable television stations, including as a Video On Demand option. For a complete listing of stations and airdates, visit www.adoptFlorida.org.

To learn more about the Governor's adoption initiative, please visit www.adoptflorida.org. To learn more about Florida's Heart Gallery contact Jesse Miller at jmiller@childrensboard.org.

###