



November 2, 2021 - Volume 2, Edition 22



Children Services Administrator Stephanie Clancy feels deeply connected to her work with the Heart Gallery Program at DCFS due, in part, to her family story.

Stephanie Clancy’s life was shaped by adoption from the start. Her mother was adopted as a child. Then, at age 24, Stephanie unexpectedly connected with her older biological sister who she didn’t know had been placed for adoption at birth. Her personal connection has informed her work with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). First, as an adoption social worker and then, as administrator of the Heart Gallery Program.

“When I started, I didn’t know much about adoption other than how it had impacted my family,” said Stephanie, who is retiring in November after 22 years with the department. “My initial training at DCFS focused on adoptions, and it ignited a passion that I didn’t

realize I had — to help those going through the process.”

Having personally seen adoption’s impact from multiple vantage points, Stephanie loves that her work allows her to use her perspective to help youth make a heartfelt connection and find their forever home. She took over administration of the Heart Gallery shortly after its inception in 2006.

The Heart Gallery is a website and traveling exhibit that showcases captivating images of youth waiting to be adopted, paired with a short description to give potential families insight into their unique personalities. Often, the children featured include those with special needs or sibling sets, and those over age nine whom DCFS has struggled to successfully match with an adoptive family.

If reunification with biological parents is not possible, those open to the idea of adoption can be referred to the program by their social worker.. Programs like the Heart Gallery go above and beyond traditional services to help make adoptions happen, even in the most challenging of cases.

According to Stephanie, typical snapshots of youth are often unflattering, serving little benefit to placement efforts. The Heart Gallery works with volunteer professional photographers to capture portraits that add depth and humanity to case files.

“These amazing photographers take pictures that are works of art, capturing the spirit and essence of our kids inside and out,” Stephanie said.

She coordinates photo sessions through organizations like the Los Angeles Dodgers, Los Angeles County Arboretum, California Science Center and Kidspace Children’s Museum to create depictions that highlight the promise and optimism of children and youth in foster care who hope to find a permanent home. More than 100 youth are photographed each year.

The images are featured on the [Heart Gallery website](#) as well as other sites run by external organizations. In addition, they are used for the annual Heart Gallery calendar distributed throughout the community.

“When families can really see a child, it negates a lot of what’s on paper and helps them connect from the heart,” Stephanie said, emphasizing that Heart Gallery images can help to spark that initial connection.

She loves hearing from those who have benefited from the Heart Gallery’s efforts. Children and youth have shared that the experience made them feel special and finally seen for who they are.



Heart Gallery volunteer photographers work to capture the joyful, playful and sometimes inquisitive personalities of children in need of adoption.

One such youth was shuffled around multiple foster homes that couldn’t handle his unique energy. His gifted personality came through in his pictures and biography featured on the Heart Gallery website and immediately resonated with his adoptive mother. Her support allowed him to flourish, leading to his eventual acceptance with a premier dance institution.

“There is an amazing story behind each child who finds their forever family,” Stephanie said. “Every child deserves a family, and we need to keep their faces out there. All it takes is one connection with a parent willing to meet them where they are and learn what makes them tick. I am so grateful to be a small part of that miracle.”

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