



Michigan Heart Gallery Features Faces of Foster Kids

Updated: Wednesday, 05 May 2010, 6:10 PM EDT
Published : Friday, 23 Apr 2010, 6:54 PM EDT

AMY LANGE – WJBK Fox 2 Detroit

DETROIT - Hundreds of Michigan children have a simple wish. All they want is a family that they can call their own. Friday marked the grand opening of the Michigan Heart Gallery. It offers a chance to be introduced to some of Michigan's children who are waiting and hoping for a home.

Smiling, laughing, serious, siblings, daughters, sons -- what these children all have in common is the need for a forever family.

"To have a family is one of the most important things," said Heidi Raubenolt with Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange. "Kids need support in their lives."

The Michigan Heart Gallery pairs professional photographers with waiting kids. More than 4,000 Michigan children are in the foster system. 500 are waiting to be adopted. Many of them are ten and older and harder to place. They may have siblings or special needs, but they have so much to give.

"A lot of love, a great sense of humor, energy. They're amazing kids. They really are," Raubenolt said.

Each year, 500 children age out of Michigan's foster care system when they turn 18. On their own with little support, some end up homeless or in jail. That is just one of the reasons it is so important to get them out of the system and into loving homes.

"There is a new generation coming that... aren't paid attention to that will become problematic. So, why not pay attention to our future now and not have to pay a price for it later on," said Edd Snyder with the Charles H. Wright Museum.

The Heart Gallery will travel the state showcasing some of the many Michigan children who may just be waiting to join your family. The exhibit will be at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History until May first.

For more information, please visit www.miheart.org.



Regular Photo Size

- **Michigan Heart Gallery**

Suzanne Stiles Burke has been the Director for the Bureau of Child Welfare since 2009. She has dedicated over 30 years of service to the department and has spent the past 28 years of her career in children's services, which includes 13 years of direct supervision of the foster care, juvenile justice and protective services programs as a Social Services Program Manager in Eaton County.

You can learn more at www.michigan.gov/perfectparent.



Michigan Heart Gallery Features Faces...

Hundreds of Michigan children have a simple wish. All they want...



2010 Michigan Heart Gallery Grand...

Charles H. Wright Museum. Photographic exhibit of Michigan's ...

What Opening Your Heart Can Do For a Child

Updated: Wednesday, 05 May 2010, 6:09 PM EDT
Published : Wednesday, 05 May 2010, 6:05 PM EDT

This was a story told recently at a Michigan Heart Gallery fundraiser. Web: <http://www.miheart.org/>

A speech by Suzanne Stiles Burke:

By sharing your personal stories, you help to tell the story of the hundreds of other children in Michigan who are waiting for a family of their own. By sharing your beautiful faces you put a face on the children who can be hidden within the system.

I am reminded of the story of a 5 year old girl named Irene and her brother Frank. Their very young mother

Rose was unable to care for them and they were placed in foster care. One day a man came to visit. Irene couldn't remember ever having seen him before, but he said he was her father. Irene heard him tell her caseworker, "I can take the boy but not the girl." And just like that, the man took Frank and Irene was alone. It would be many, many years, after they were adults, before she and Frank would see each other again.

Irene was adopted at the age of 5 by a wonderful woman. Irene was a smart little girl. She did well in school and when she was 15, she got a job as a waitress in a Tea Room, which is something like a Starbucks. One day, the police came to the Tea Room and told Irene that her mother had died suddenly and that she needed to come with them. Once again, Irene was alone without a family.

But not for long. Irene's employer, Mrs. Johnson, cared for Irene and was so moved by her story that she invited Irene to live with her. Soon, Mrs. Johnson adopted Irene and became her mother. Irene was able to continue working, going to her same school, with her same friends. She graduated, got a better job, met a husband, and ended up raising a family of her own and having a very happy life.

Irene's story began over a hundred years ago. It is a story of life and loss and family that is as old as time and as current as today.

I know this story so well because Irene was my grandmother. She has been gone a long time. Because of the miracle of not one but two adoptions by two equally compassionate and loving women, Irene's story was a good story with a happy ending that lead to many, many other happy stories.

Because of the adoptions of Irene not once but miraculously twice, the life stories of both my mother and then me were possible. Because of Irene's adoptions a hundred years ago, I have the great privilege TODAY to serve as the Director of the Bureau of Child Welfare for our state, and the distinct honor to stand before you tonight to welcome you to the 2010 Heart Gallery. You just never know what opening your heart to a child will mean for that child now, for the future, and for generations yet to come. All because one person reached out to one child in need of a family.

Adoption works. The gift of a family, a family of any kind and at any time in a child's life, works. The unconditional love and commitment of just one significant adult can make all the difference.

Tonight we recognize these beautiful children and the talented photographers who have given of their time and talents to create these amazing portraits. The children have courageously opened their hearts to the hope of a loving family and future. These artists took the time to learn about each child, hear and honor their story, and let that child's spirit shine through these stunning photos.

These children only ask for what we all want and so many of us take for granted; a home, the love of a permanent family, and a story with a happy ending.

GET INVOLVED: Michigan Heart Gallery, Web: <http://www.miheart.org/>