

May 21, 2010

I wanted to follow-up on the email I sent last week about the Broken Children/Broken System series on News 8. I have had a few questions and want to clarify what the Adoption Coalition of Texas is and what we do.

- First, the series touched quite a bit on the use of taxpayer money to support children in foster care. **This does not apply to the Adoption Coalition of Texas.** Our efforts are completely independent. We do not receive one dime from taxpayers or the state. So, where do we get our money. Our money is derived strictly from the fundraising we do – money given by people and/or organizations that support our efforts. That is why we are continually trying to fundraise... we need to continue our efforts. **Every year we have to raise \$200,000 to stay in business.**
- **What does the Adoption Coalition of Texas do?**
  - We have streamlined the adoption system in Central Texas to provide a central resource for information on the process and the kids.
    - We answer calls from across the country about kids.
    - We answer calls from across the country about the adoption process.
    - We help get folks connected to our partner child placing agencies to begin the process.
    - We implement any program possible to help find families for kids
    - We do whatever is necessary to help advocate for kids – to help bring their lives to the community
    - We do media campaigns to educate the community about adoption and waiting kids.
  - We have 3.5 staff –
    - Tracy Eilers (Myself) – I do the:
      - Administration
      - Event planning (fundraisers, The Heart Gallery of Central Texas Unveiling/Premiere match/recruitment events, special events for kids)
      - Community awareness
      - Speaking engagements
      - Advocacy for children
      - The Heart Gallery of Central Texas
      - Forever Families
      - Media relations (various TV and written publication activities)
      - Fundraising
      - Answer general inquiries
      - Match and recruitment activities
      - Talk to families that have adopted
      - Simply help lead our effort to find forever families, from across the country, for kids in foster care.
      - And much much more
    - Lisa Reed – Lisa coordinates:
      - The Heart Gallery of Central Texas
        - Gathers the list of kids to be photographed
        - Recruits and coordinate the photographers who photograph the kids
        - Schedules and coordinates the actual shoots
        - Helps problem solve
        - Facilitates the filming of Forever Families

- Drives and picks up children when necessary
  - Coordinates the display of The Heart Gallery of Central Texas (and often moves it and sets it up)
  - Serves on the Hays County task for foster care reform
  - And much much more
- Grace Lindgren – Grace is a special adoption recruiter – the **Wendy’s Wonderful Kids** recruiter. This is a program through **The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption** and it allows a full-time staff person to carry a smaller caseload (under 20) of kids waiting for adoption. She has the ability to really get to know the kids, talk in-depth to the potential families and conduct very in-depth adoption preparation and matching.
    - Visits the kids on her case load at least once a month, often more.
    - Travels all over Central Texas to visit kids, meet with case workers, etc
    - Reviews the case file to search for potential options for placement
    - Broadcasts profiles about kids
    - Coordinates with agencies across the country that have waiting families
    - Talks to families inquiring about kids on her caseload
    - Prepares profiles of children and provides additional information about their needs, likes, etc
    - Reviews home studies and makes recommendations on family selection
    - Participates and coordinates documents for families being considered to adopt a child – participates in the presentation meetings
    - Works closely with the CPS case workers assigned to each child
    - Recommends children for The Heart Gallery of Central Texas project and Forever Families
    - And much much more
  - Becca Floyd – Becca works part-time and focuses on providing child profiles of children, answering questions, explaining the adoption process to callers and making sure the families get connected with the system. Becca also helps with match and recruitment events, and special events for kids such as the Water Ski Camp and Back to School Drive. At this time, we are not able to staff this position full time due to financial constraints.
- **We operate under the Austin Community Foundation**, a local 501c3, as a special fund. This gives us the ability to utilize our very limited resources on the kids and the programs we operate. Austin Community Foundation does the payroll, finances, audits and human resources. We could not afford these activities on our own. It is because of the Austin Community Foundation that we exist. By working under their fiscal umbrella, we are a nonprofit organization able to focus in-depth on its mission.
  - We have a variety of ongoing programs:
    - **The Heart Gallery of Central Texas** – The Heart Gallery of Central Texas began in January 2005 with its first unveiling in August 2005. The Heart Gallery of Central Texas is a traveling art exhibit consisting of portraits of children in foster care waiting for adoption. Each year, there are over 60 professional and documentary photographers that volunteer their time and talent to photograph kids residing in foster homes, shelters and residential treatment centers across the state of Texas. For a period of 6 months, the project is in planning phase.... it takes time for the photographers to be matched with kids and schedule photo shoots. Once the project is unveiled, it physically travels around Central Texas for 6 months (meaning we find locations, we load it in the car, we drive it to its venue and often, we hang it). In addition, we maintain the website –

[www.heartgallerytexas.com](http://www.heartgallerytexas.com) where folks from across the country are able to view the portraits of the kids. We receive, on average, 20 inquiries a day from across the country. We personally respond to all of them.

- **Forever Families** – Since February 2004, the Adoption Coalition of Texas has partnered with News 8 Austin for the Forever Families segment. News 8 Austin has been committed to finding homes for waiting children since day one. For more than 6 years now, a segment has aired once a week – that is over 312 segments!! Because News 8 saves the segments on their website, families from across the country are able to view these stories about children.
- **Match/Recruitment Events** – Each year we host match and recruitment events. We have recently combined these activities. A match event is where we bring families waiting to adopt (or in the adoption process) together with case workers who represent the children. A recruitment event is where we invite the general public to learn more about the foster care system, about becoming a foster and/or adoptive parent. We host these in various locations across Central Texas.
- **Misc Events** – We plan and implement a variety of events to directly impact the kids, such as the summer Water Ski camp (brought to us by an amazing group of volunteers), the Back to School Back Pack Drive (in partnership with The River 102.3 radio station) and the Holiday Drive. All of these are time consuming but have such a positive impact on children whose hopes and dreams need to be reinforced.

I've summarized the majority of items, as I could write a book here on what we do. The bottom line is **it is important our organization exists and we survive solely on donations from the community – NOT taxpayer money.**

I would be happy to answer anyone's questions anytime. We are very proud of the work we have accomplished and the work we do. In our 6 years of existence, many older kids and sibling groups, and foster kids in general, have been adopted. Our success is staggering. I don't think anyone reading this would question that. If you know of the Adoption Coalition of Texas, I am confident you support what we do and believe it is important. You can learn more at our website – [www.adoptioncoalitiontx.org](http://www.adoptioncoalitiontx.org).

We have plans for the future, plans to keep working hard as long as there are waiting kids.. These kids were abused, neglected and treated horribly. We have the chance to make a change for their future, give them stability, prevent homelessness – to simply provide a child with a positive opportunity. We cannot give up – the kids need us.

Thank you for reading and sharing in our efforts,

Best,

Tracy