



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Exhibit puts a face on hundreds of state kids in need of adoption

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KALAMAZOO -- Fourteen-year-old Arius -- a self-described smart, talented young fellow who enjoys playing sports -- hopes to be adopted before he turns 16.

Thirteen-year-old Billy Ray, voted "most-improved student" last year, is proud of his accomplishments and his ability to take apart just about anything.

Danielle, 16, is described as a poised young lady who already has life plans -- including winning a basketball scholarship, going to college for a degree in criminal justice and becoming a crime-scene investigator. Her hope is for a permanent family who "loves me for who I am."

The faces of these three will be among those greeting the public in the Michigan Heart Gallery photo exhibit opening today at the Kalamazoo Public Library's downtown-Kalamazoo branch; the photos will be on display through Dec. 9 at a few of the library's high-traffic areas -- near the stairwells on the lower level and second and third floors. November is National Adoption Awareness Month.

The Michigan Heart Gallery, coordinated by the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, is an exhibit of photographs of children from the state's foster-care system who are eligible for adoption. The goal is to increase awareness of the need for adoptive homes for older children.

Created in November 2005, the exhibit has traveled throughout the state and has led to several adoptions.

Michigan has about 300 foster-care children awaiting adoption. According to the Michigan Heart Gallery's Web site, most are African-American, older than 8 and part of sibling sets -- meaning that they need to be adopted along with their brothers and sisters.

Family and Children Services of Kalamazoo is coordinating the exhibit.

In a press release, Joanne Kraska, director of foster care and adoption for Family & Children Services, cautioned possible adopters from thinking that love is enough to sustain adopted children.

"Many of these children have had traumatic experiences or have been born drug- or alcohol-exposed," she said in the release. "They need much more than love."

"The more they truly want to be loved and accepted, the more likely they are to act in ways that are difficult to understand. This is why, for adoption to be successful, it must be about a family that is willing to change to meet the needs of the child, not about changing the child to fit into the family."

Since 2003, Family & Children Services has helped more than 50 children move into permanent homes.

Photographers needed

The Michigan Heart Gallery is looking for photographers for its 2008 exhibition. For information, visit www.miheart.org/2007/ or call (517) 783-6273.

About the exhibit

The Michigan Heart Gallery exhibit opens at the Kalamazoo Public Library today and runs through Dec. 9. A public reception is planned for 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday in the library's Van Deusen Room, on the third floor.

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