

Missouri Adoption Heart Gallery

Life is better with kids around!



Missouri Adoption Heart Gallery | www.moheartgallery.org | 1.800.554.2222

About the Missouri Heart Gallery

There are currently more than 1,200 Missouri children in foster care who are unable to return to their biological parents and are in need of adoptive parents to provide a permanent home and a family to help them move forward in their life.

That's why in 2006, Missouri began the Heart Gallery project. The Missouri Heart Gallery helps children in foster care who are waiting for adoptive families to step from the shadows into the light in a unique way. Missouri Adoption Heart Gallery and the website, MOHeartGallery.org, features stirring portraits of these children which reveal their amazing spirit and individuality. Thanks to



the Heart Gallery, many children now have a family of their own to celebrate milestones and holidays with and loving parents they deserve, to comfort, support, and guide them.

In addition to adoptive parents, Missouri is always looking for foster parents to provide safe and caring temporary homes for children whose families are currently unable to care for them. There are more than 13,000 Missouri children in foster care. Throughout a child's stay, foster parents are invaluable members of the team who works together to meet the needs of the family in order to safely return the child home whenever possible.

The Missouri Heart Gallery website, MOHeartGallery.org, also provides information about becoming a foster or adoptive parent. There is also a toll-free number for prospective foster and adoptive parents to call with questions, as well as YouTube commercials that organizations and advocates can include on their website or social media.

The Missouri Heart Gallery is a joint effort between the Missouri Department of Social Services Children's Division and The Adoption Exchange-Missouri office.

The Adoption Exchange has been making the connection between adoptive families and children

with special needs since 1983. The Adoption Exchange recruits families for our country's most vulnerable children who currently wait in foster care. For more than 30 years, the Adoption Exchange has offered hope and helped find families for more than 8,000 children.



**To learn more about how
you could help change
a child's life, please visit
MOHeartGallery.org**



Adoption, Foster Care & Training Information

Adoption Overview

Adoptive families provide a permanent home to a child in care. Adoption is the legal transfer of parental rights and responsibilities from a child's birth parents to the adoptive parents.

Many of the children who wait to be adopted from foster care are age five or older, are of minority descent, have siblings who also need adoptive parents, and have lived in multiple foster homes.

Foster Care Overview

Foster parents provide temporary care for children whose families are not currently able to care for them. Foster parents provide a safe and supportive home and help to meet a child's emotional, physical, and social needs while they are

in care. Foster parents offer general guidance for growth and development to a child and their family, while supporting the child's relationships with kin and others who are important to them.

Throughout a child's stay, foster parents are active professional members of the team which consists of the child's worker, the child and their family, the court and community members who work together to safely return the child home whenever possible.

Training Overview

The first step toward becoming a foster or adoptive parent is the agency's assessment and training program.

All foster and adoptive parents are required to successfully

complete our Specialized Training, Assessment, Resources, Support and Skills (STARS) program. The STARS program introduces prospective foster and adoptive families to the rewards and challenges involved in caring for Missouri's most vulnerable children. The sessions also offer an opportunity to have questions answered, build relationships with other parents and agency staff, and to determine if foster or adoptive parenting is the right choice.

The STARS program is important for even the most experienced parents because fostering and adopting is very different from parenting a biological child. Foster and adoptive parents must support the relationship between the child and his/her birth family and help the child manage feelings



about being in foster care, or the possibility of being adopted.

STARS is a pre-service training program that strives to prepare you to:

- ➔ Protect and nurture foster and adoptive children;
- ➔ Meet children's developmental needs and address developmental delays;
- ➔ Support relationships between children and their families;
- ➔ Connect children with safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime; and
- ➔ Actively participate in a professional team.

STARS also includes an in-home assessment consisting of at least

four visits to your home by a Resource Development worker. The worker will discuss information with you about our agency and the children in our care, as well as talk with you about your family. He or she will also look at your home environment for compliance with licensing requirements. Part of the assessment process is to help you make important decisions about whether or not fostering or adopting a child is right for you and your family.

Additional training is required for prospective adoptive families. These classes offer tools and information needed to:

- ➔ Understand how adoptive families are different;
- ➔ Anticipate the effects of

separation, loss, and grief in adoption;

- ➔ Understand the need to maintain optimal connection with those who matter to the child;
- ➔ Understand attachment and its importance in adoption;
- ➔ Anticipate challenges and identify strategies for managing challenges as an adoptive family; and
- ➔ Explore the lifelong commitment to a child that adoption requires.

Training sessions provide the opportunity to have questions answered, build relationships with other parents and agency staff, and to determine whether your family has the ability and desire to meet the children's needs.



Foster Care and Adoption Frequently Asked Questions



What is foster care?

Foster care is a temporary placement for children without parental care due to abuse or neglect. Foster families provide a safe and nurturing home while the biological parents receive support services to regain custody of their children.

What is adoption?

Adoption is the permanent home option for children who have been in foster care. Children are legally free for adoption only after the court has terminated the parental rights of the birth parents.

Who are the children in foster care or awaiting adoption?

Children in foster care range in age from 0 to 21 and frequently have siblings who must remain together. More than half are of minority descent. Some of these children have physical, mental or emotional disabilities ranging from mild to severe. Children enter foster care due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment. All have endured the



trauma of being separated from their families. Just as each child is an individual, the challenges in meeting their needs will vary, but they all need patience, understanding and unconditional love.

Do I have to be married?

You do not have to be married.

Do I have to own my own home?

Foster and adoptive parents do not have to own their own home; in fact, many foster and adoptive parents rent their residence.

What are the costs of becoming a foster or adoptive parent?

There is little to no cost involved

in becoming a foster or adoptive parent. The home assessment and training is provided by the state free of charge. The majority of adoption expenses are covered by the state.

Do I have a choice in which foster children are placed in my home?

Your individual parenting skills and the capacity of your home will be matched with the information you provide in regard to child preferences. This allows the agency to identify when you, as a parent, are most likely to meet the unique needs of a child in the state's care. The assessment process is on-going and part of the continuing licensure process. It is crucial that homes be identified that will best meet the parenting needs of children in care.

Even if your home is identified as suitable for a specific child, foster parents have the option to decline the placement.

What type of support services are provided after a child is placed in my home?

Foster parents receive a monthly maintenance payment to help cover the costs of caring for their foster children. Medicaid is provided by the state for the child's medical, psychological and dental needs. Additionally, foster parents and adoptive parents who are employed or enrolled in school full time may be able to receive childcare services. Visitation plans for children and their families are also part of the supportive services offered to maintain and preserve those essential relationships and



connections that are vital to a child's development and reunification.

What are the age requirements to become a foster or adoptive parent?

The minimum age is 21. There is no maximum age limit.

What are the training requirements for becoming foster or adoptive parents?

Both foster and adoptive parents are required to complete a 27 hour pre-service program called Specialized Training, Assessment, Resources, Support and Skills (STARS). Foster parents are required to complete 30 hours of in-service training during their two-year licensure period. In two-

parent homes, both parents must complete the required number of training hours. An additional 12 hours of specialized training is required for individuals or couples wishing to adopt.

Do I have to foster before I can adopt?

No, you do not have to become a foster parent before you are able to become an adoptive parent.

To be a foster or adoptive parent, you must:

- »→ Be at least 21 years of age;
- »→ Complete a child abuse/neglect check and criminal record check including fingerprints;
- »→ Be in good health, both physically and mentally;
- »→ Have a stable income;
- »→ Be willing to participate in and complete a free training and assessment process;
- »→ Be part of a professional team willing to voice perspectives and concerns; and
- »→ Be willing to partner with the child's family.

You can:

- »→ Be with or without children;
- »→ Be single or married; and
- »→ Own or rent a home, apartment, condo, or other residence that meets the licensing standards.



Ways you can help children living with foster families in your community:



- » Hold luggage/backpack drive
- » Tutor or mentor children/youth
- » Provide respite care
- » Provide special holiday help
- » Make a monetary donation for: new glasses, new shoes for starting school, school pictures, haircuts, hair and/or nail services for prom, yearbook, class ring, graduation cap and gown, prom dress, tuxedo rental, sports equipment or uniforms, extracurricular or summer activities
- » Donate items for children and youth: children's books, school supplies, musical instruments, new items such as underwear, socks, coats, or earrings, phone cards for youth to stay close to family, treats for a child to distribute at school on special occasions, fingernail polish, or makeup
- » Donate items for foster families: laundry detergent, fabric softener, bedding, toothbrushes, deodorant, hair care supplies, Christmas ornaments, gift certificates for a resource family night at a local restaurant or at the movies





Home Sweet Home: Three Families Grow

By Adopting Children Through Foster Care





Home Sweet Home: Katie



*To protect the privacy of adopted children and their families, names have been changed and stock photography was used to depict children and/or their families.





➔ *Katie's Dad, Ryan:*

We weren't looking to adopt again. At that time, our oldest adopted daughter had been settled in for five years and was getting close to graduating from high school. Still, I was curious about the waiting kids out there. I looked at the Heart Gallery and the Adoption Exchange lists once a week. Would these kids get placed? How long did they wait? But then I saw Katie's picture. Veterans of two multi-racial adoptions, looks were not what mattered to us. Regardless, what I saw in Katie was a preteen girl that looked like my wife, but with my nose and my blue eyes. My heart claimed her and I couldn't get out of my head that this could be our daughter, and she was out there, waiting.

"People ask me many times, do you love your adopted kids as much as your biological ones?"

The answer is an overwhelming yes, and sometimes it happens even before you meet them. "

For the next year I kept asking about her, even waiting through another match she had that failed. My wife thought I was a little loony, but in the end, my heart was right. She was our daughter, she is our daughter, and she always will be. When we brought her home, she still had the hat she wore in her Heart Gallery pictures. A symbol

of her past that we had never seen, the hat was foreign, but it disappeared quickly. She left her name behind as well because she wanted a fresh start with a new attitude. Dawn was the girl in the Heart Gallery, but Katie moved in with us.

People ask me many times, do you love your adopted kids as much as your biological ones? The answer is an overwhelming yes, and sometimes it happens even before you meet them.

She's growing up fast now; driving a car, getting a job, and getting asked out to prom. I'm proud of the changes she has made and the woman she is becoming. Other dads are upset because their little girls grow up quickly, but I'm just glad I didn't miss more.





➔ *Katie:*

When I was in foster care, I always dreamt of a big happy family with a lot of kids and animals. I wanted them to love Chinese food just like me and eat it AT LEAST three times a week! I wanted to live on a farm with horses and baby pigs and chickens. Being in foster care though, I had a lot on my mind and didn't necessarily think about my dream forever family a lot. I was very angry at the world so I lashed out at everyone around me. This made me feel like a monster but I knew that I was only protecting myself; or so I thought. I had multiple families try and take me on to adopt me but I was too much of a struggle for them. After being in the foster care system for almost eight years, my real forever family

came along and changed my life forever.

Two days battle for the best day of my life: the day I met my forever parents and the day I was officially adopted. When I met my parents, they had known me for about a year. I had no clue though; all I knew is that I liked them! They told me stories about their family (soon to be mine as well) and how they had four other kids who all loved Chinese food! You wouldn't believe how excited I was. Even though they didn't live on a farm and my "mom to be" was allergic to my favorite animal (horse), I didn't care. I was just grateful to have the chance to have my own forever family.

The day of my adoption was scary and exciting. We thought of it much like a wedding ceremony, I

was being formally united with my family forever. I wore a white dress that resembled a wedding dress with a red bow and sparkly red heels. That day was perfect, and I even remember the judge. He was awesome and so happy for me too! I will never forget that day.

"My real forever family came along and changed my life forever."

The first couple of weeks with my new family were scary and I felt like I was stepping on broken glass. I tried my best to be on my best manners and to behave well.



After a while though, I started to trust them. I let out a few burps once and a while and they didn't even care! Once I felt a little safer I started acting out because I still didn't fully trust my family and especially my new parents. This life seemed like it was too good to be true, so I "tested the waters" for a while before I knew I could fully trust them. Once I did, I knew that I would always be safe, forever. That was the best feeling that I had ever had.

»→ *Katie*



Home Sweet Home: James, Sarah, Jacob & John



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Noah and Mary began their journey as foster and adoptive parents many years ago. Since then, they have adopted twelve children and greatly extended their family. "We felt like God wanted us to reach out," Mary explained, "There is such a need for children to have a home for a lifetime."

About two years ago, the family adopted James and a sibling group of three who had been featured in the Missouri Heart Gallery. At the time of adoption, James was 14 years old, and the three siblings, Sarah, Jacob, and John were 11, 10, and 9.

According to Sarah, being a part of a forever family has taught her about "responsibility, hard work, and how to notice the feelings of other people." Jacob said, "I've

especially been learning to show love for my brothers, sisters and parents. They've been teaching me about God." John, the youngest of the siblings, excitedly added, "We have a lot of fun and go places together!"

The older age of the children did not detour this family, as they saw potential in all of them. "Just because they are older doesn't mean they do not still need time and love," they explained.

Jacob said the best part about being adopted is "belonging, feeling wanted, and having hope for my future." James explained that it felt good to have parents that love him unconditionally and will stick with him through the good and the bad times.

Noah and Mary said that if they had just one piece of advice to those interested in adoption, it would be to: "Be strong and be committed." By opening their home and hearts to these children, Noah and Mary have allowed them to learn and grow in a stable environment. When asked, all of the children agreed that having a forever family meant that they feel "loved, happy and cared for."

»→ *James, Sarah,
Jacob & John*



Home Sweet Home: Emily



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When Amy first met Emily, 19, she explained it “just fit.” “I can’t explain it,” Amy said, “it just clicked. I felt like her mother right away.”

Both sets of Amy’s grandparents had adopted, so she was exposed to the process early on. Even as a child, Amy knew she would like to adopt one day. Her heart broke for those children who didn’t have someone to call “mommy,” and she always felt like every child, no matter their age, should have a mom. “When they go to college and start having their own family; they still need their mom,” Amy explained.

Amy is a single mother of two and a foster mother. “Patience and understanding is key to filling in the blanks, it is important to never

give up – even when boundaries are tested,” Amy stated. Emily was placed with Amy at age 19 and legally adopted at 20. Once adopted, Emily not only gained a mother, but gained siblings as she became an older sister. Emily never gave up on the idea of finding a forever family, and she feels like it’s important for older youth to know that a forever family “will come when you least expect it.”

For Emily, the best part of being adopted is having somewhere to call home. “I have a place I belong, and I have a family that doesn’t care if I need time alone or that I don’t like hugs,” Emily said. “They still love me, and they always will.”

Emily is currently living in her own apartment, working and attending college.

“Family to us is love,” Amy explained. “Love makes a house a home.”

»→ *Emily*



For information on how to
become a foster or adoptive parent,
please call toll free at: 1.800.554.2222
or visit us online at MOHeartGallery.org



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