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CALENDAR LISTING:

April 22-June 31: Westgate Mall hosts the Heart Gallery Photography Exhibit, featuring 24 portraits of youth in state foster care in need of adoption. Organized by the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE), the Heart Gallery is designed to raise awareness of the hundreds of local children who are waiting for families. Volunteer photographers create portraits of the local children and teens, ages 6-16, who are awaiting adoption. The Heart Gallery exhibit is free, and can be seen at Westgate Mall, Brockton, during regular business hours from April 22 – June 31. For more info, contact MARE at 617-54-ADOPT (617-542-3678) or visit www.MAREinc.org.

PRESS RELEASE

Portraits of Children Waiting for Adoption on Display in Brockton

(Brockton, MA) – Ten-year-old Destiny says she wants to be a teacher when she grows up. Makalah, 15, is an aspiring fashion designer. And Edward, 6, claims that when he’s a chef, he’ll make the best hot wings ever! What do Destiny, Makalah, and Edward all have in common? Besides being photogenic, fun-loving kids, they all live in temporary state foster care, waiting for adoption into a permanent family. And portraits of them – along with those of 21 other waiting children – are now on display at the Westgate Mall in Brockton, through June 31.

The Westgate Mall is showing support for adoption from foster care by hosting the acclaimed MARE Heart Gallery, a striking collection of portraits of local children and teens in Massachusetts foster care.

Organized by the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange (MARE), the Heart Gallery travels across the state to increase awareness of adoption from foster care and to recruit families for the hundreds of children in state care in need of adoption. Volunteer professional and amateur photographers donate their time and talent to photograph these children and teens. A wide range of youth are featured in the exhibit – school-aged youth, sibling groups, children of color of all ages as well as youth with special needs. Since 2005, MARE has featured over 200 children in the Heart Gallery exhibits.

Each year, more than 600 teens ‘age out’ of the Massachusetts foster care system at age 18. While support services are available, teens aging out of foster care are at high risk for unemployment and homelessness. So far, through public awareness programs like the Heart Gallery, MARE has helped more than 5,600 children and teens join stable and nurturing families – but more youth need permanent families every week.

“We are delighted that the Westgate Mall is donating space for the Heart Gallery in an effort to help us find safe and happy homes for the state’s neediest youth,” said Lisa Funaro, MARE’s executive director. “All children have a great family out there... we just need to find them!”

In addition to the traveling Heart Gallery, MARE also features smaller versions of the exhibit at various locations statewide. Heart Gallery portraits can be seen at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services in Boston, the Cambridge Health Alliance Malden Family Medical Center in Malden, and the Discovery Museums in Acton, MA. Jordan's Furniture also hosts permanent Heart Gallery displays in its Reading, Natick, Avon, and Nashua stores.

MARE is a private, non-profit organization founded in 1957 to find a "permanent place to call home" for children and teens in foster care, including sibling groups and children who are traditionally harder to place. MARE works in cooperation with the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF) and private adoption agencies. For more information on MARE's Heart Gallery, or on adopting a child from foster care, contact MARE at 617-54-ADOPT (617-542-3678) or visit www.MAREinc.org/

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