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## Photos of About 50 Older Children Who Need Adoption Will Be on Display

By [Leann Holt](#)

*Journal Staff Writer*

In her spotless white party dress, her black hair pulled back neatly into yellow barrettes, Fernanda looked like she could be going to Sunday dinner at grandmother's house. Instead, the 9-year-old was standing shyly in front of a monkey exhibit at the Rio Grande Zoo last week, her arms crossed protectively over her tiny frame. She was concentrating on the camera in front of her, seeming to search inside it for a family who wanted her.

"A family," was Fernanda's whispered answer when someone asked what her one wish was.

Fernanda is one of about 50 older New Mexico children waiting for adoption whose photos will be on display at Heart Gallery of New Mexico exhibit in Albuquerque next month. The show is a way to give potential adoptive families a peek at the essence of the children — something that's not easy to do with a mug shot on a file folder.

"Here's this young child that nobody really knows," said Miguel Gandert, the well-known New Mexico photographer who photographed Fernanda.

"I'm trying to make a picture where people will see a mystery and see a spirit and want to know her," he said of Fernanda. "She's a beautiful child — you just get a sense of that."

Gandert is one of about 50 professional photographers and artists in the state who will display their oil paintings, black and white photographs and mixed media portraits of older children available for adoption at the National Hispanic Cultural Center Aug. 5-27.

Begun in New Mexico in 2001 by Children, Youth and Families employee Diane Granito, more than 80 Heart Galleries operate in 46 states. The project has received national media attention and resulted in hundreds of adoptions of what are considered to be hard-to-place children.

"It's the power of the photographs that pulls people into the project and to adoption," Granito said. "We've had people walk around the show and break down in tears.

"That's because the photographers put their whole heart and soul into it."

Santa Fe photographer and artist Jackie Mathey went one step further. Mathey and her husband adopted Faye after Mathey photographed the 10-year-old in 2002.

### Wishing for Families



Jaelyn Demaria/Journal

9-year-old Fernanda finishes off an ice cream cone as she is photographed by Miguel Gandert at the Rio Grande Zoo.

"We weren't looking to adopt, but if you met her, you'd understand why we did," Mathey said. "She's full of light, full of love and just a beautiful spirit."

Mathey, who has photographed four children for the Heart Gallery, said the portraits help move families past the fear that often comes with adopting an older child.

"You don't know what the children have been through and what they've experienced," Mathey said. "But (the photos) help you see what's underneath. You look into their eyes and see a child instead of seeing their experiences."

Dan Pearlman, a CYFD attorney and photographer, was asked to photograph a group of five African American siblings. The children, ages 8 to 14, made it clear to him that they were determined to stay together when they were adopted, he said.

The photo of the children, which captured them holding hands and jumping over a puddle, won the hearts of a couple in Ruidoso. The children were adopted, and the photo now hangs in the master bedroom, Pearlman said.

"It was like they were flying," Pearlman said of the photograph. "What it shows is the spirit they have, not just as individuals, but as a group."

Pearlman, who has an adopted son, said he has photographed 10 children for the New Mexico Heart Gallery. All of them have been adopted, which has been "very gratifying," he said.

Granito said at least 18 children have been adopted in New Mexico directly from their photos since the first showing in 2001. The Heart Gallery has inspired dozens of families to adopt children who were not photographed.

And many foster families decide to adopt the children living in their homes after their photos prompt attention from potential adoptive families, Granito said.

"The foster families realize they don't want to lose the children," Granito said.

New Mexico allows singles, gays and lesbians to adopt as well as two-parent families, Granito said. The process of adopting a child from CYFD, which includes training classes, home visits and legal work, is free.

Families are usually eligible for a \$600 to \$700 a month adoption subsidy and medical coverage. Children who are adopted at age 16 or older are entitled to college scholarships.

For more information about the Heart Gallery, call 1-505-476-1045. To learn more about adoption, call (800) 432-2075.

### **WHAT: Heart Gallery of New Mexico opening in Albuquerque**

**WHEN:** Aug. 5, 6 to 8 p.m. Exhibit will be on display until Aug. 27

**WHERE:** National Hispanic Cultural Center of New Mexico, 1701 Fourth SW

**HOW MUCH:** Admission to the Heart Gallery is free