

Building and Supporting Adoptive Families Webinar

NOVEMBER 19, 2025



Presenters



Melinda Haggerty, Esq.
SVP, General Counsel

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

Melinda.Haggerty@davethomasfoundation.org



Cara Fox

Program Director

Heart Galleries of Texas

Cara.Fox@austin.utexas.edu





Wendy's Wonderful Kids in Texas

Supporting Legal Permanency with Kin & Fictive Kin

Mission

Dramatically increase the number of adoptions of children waiting in North America's foster care systems.

Vision

Every child will have a permanent home and a loving family.

We believe

every child is **ADOPTABLE.**





Dave Thomas
Foundation
for Adoption®

Wendy's
Wonderful Kids®





Last year, nearly 20,000 aged out of foster care without a permanent family

Focus Population

Children ages 9 and older
(or younger and one of the below)

- Sibling groups
- Children with special needs
- Children opposed to adoption
- Children in long-term foster care
- Children without an identified adoptive resource



Child-Focused Recruitment

- Explores child's **history** and **pre-existing relationships** to find placement and information
 - Relatives, neighbors, mentors, teachers, pastors, etc.
- Seeks the **right permanent family for the child**, not the right child for the family





Dave Thomas
Foundation
for Adoption®

Wendy's
Wonderful Kids®

THIS MODEL IS UP TO

3x

MORE EFFECTIVE*

at serving children who have
been in foster care the longest

*Source: *The Impact of Child-Focused Recruitment on Foster Care Adoption: A Five-Year Evaluation of Wendy's Wonderful Kids*,
Child Trends, Washington, D.C. (2011)



The Results

(as of October 2025)

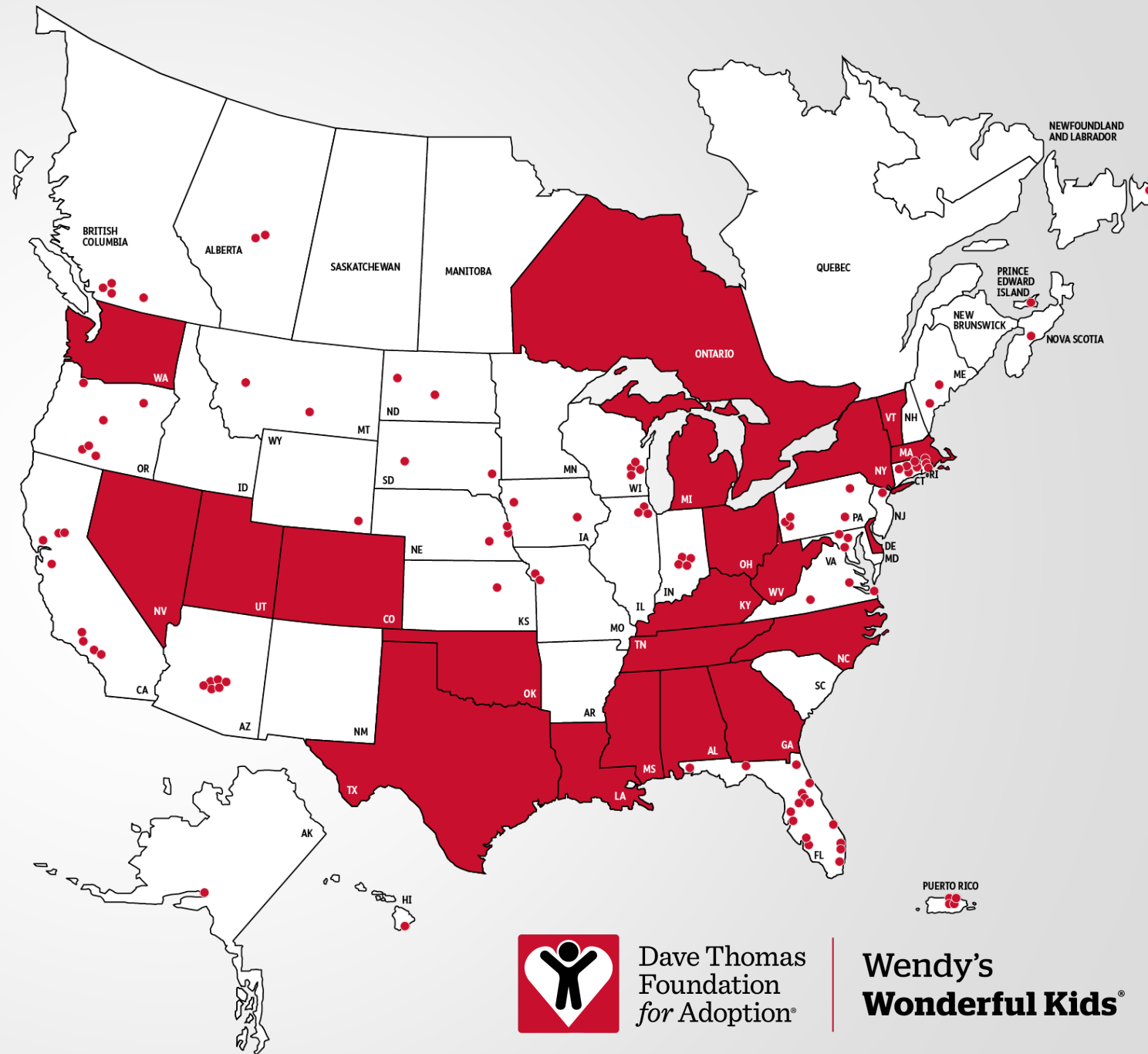
21

states & provinces
scaled/scaling

550+

adoption
recruiters

15,500+
adoptions



Dave Thomas
Foundation
for Adoption®

Wendy's
Wonderful Kids®

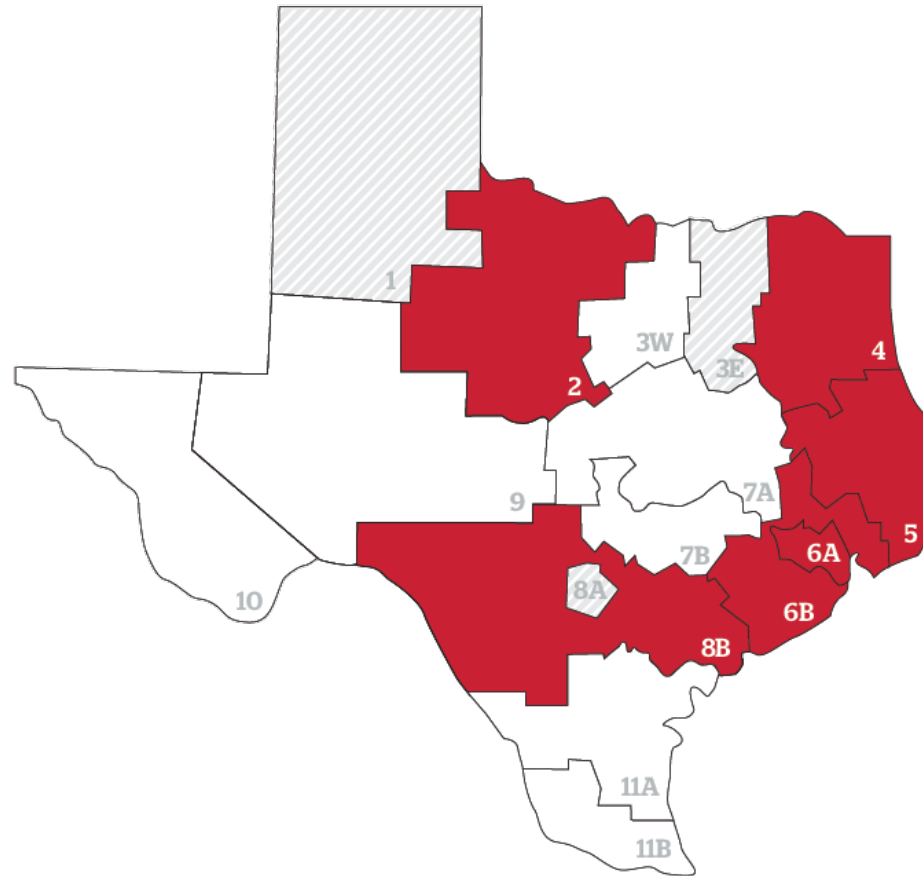
WWK Impact in **Texas**

32

adoption
recruiters

1,286

children
served



439

children currently
on caseloads

794

children
matched

542

finalizations



Youth Currently Served in **Texas**

WWK Caseloads

14

average
age

83%

part of a
sibling group

Prior to WWK

6.5

average number
of placements





Understanding the Role of Biological Parents, Kin, and Fictive Kin in Permanency Process

Permanent Placement

- Reinstatement of parental rights
TX Family Code § 161.302
- Distant relatives
- Changed circumstances

9% Texas waiting youth have been
in foster care for 5+ years



Increase Youth's Network

- Identify other relatives in the family tree who may have been missed in family search efforts
- Share other connections and relationships that were important in the youth's life before coming into care
 - Babysitters, sports, church, school, etc.



Permanency Preparation

- Permission to move forward with adoption overcomes youth fear of hurting or rejecting family of origin
- Connections to customs and traditions
 - Can provide pieces of information, photos, stories that help the youth understand their past and history to move forward





Supporting Engagement of Biological Parents, Kin, and Fictive Kin in Permanency Process

Identify Adoption Recruiter

- Ask if the youth has a WWK recruiter or dedicated adoption worker responsible for engaging kin and fictive kin in recruitment
- Invite the WWK recruiter/ adoption worker to court
- Ask about barriers to contacting/engaging kin



Support Work with Kin

- Narrowly and clearly tailor any necessary no contact orders for child safety
 - Should apply only to child
 - Allow professionals (adoption recruiters and others) the ability to engage kin and fictive kin for information
- Ensure that the kin and fictive kin in the youth's network are engaged on an **ongoing basis** until legal permanency is achieved



Discover Family Engagement Details

- When was family finding/diligent search last conducted?
 - How did we engage the kin and fictive kin identified (beyond letters)?
- What kin and fictive kin were explored as placement options throughout the youth's case & why were they ruled out?
 - Disqualifying offense?
 - Changed circumstances?
 - Does TPR change their ability to become a legally permanent placement option (i.e., reduce safety concerns)?
- When did we last speak with the youth to see who is currently important in their life?



Ensure Engagement Beyond Placement

Have we re-engaged kin and fictive kin to see what information they can provide, beyond simply serving as a legally permanent placement? For example:

- Are there other kin or fictive kin they can identify?
- Do they have information that could help the youth process trauma and connect to their identity?
- Do they want to be re-connected to the youth (if safe) even if they cannot serve as a permanent placement at this time?
- Have we asked them if they will be part of the network?





HEART
GALLERIES
OF TEXAS

Cara Fox
HGTX Program Director



Every Year:



5,000

youth in the Texas foster care system are eligible for adoption.



1,500

youth waiting to be adopted are older youth, sibling groups, or have complex medical or behavioral needs.

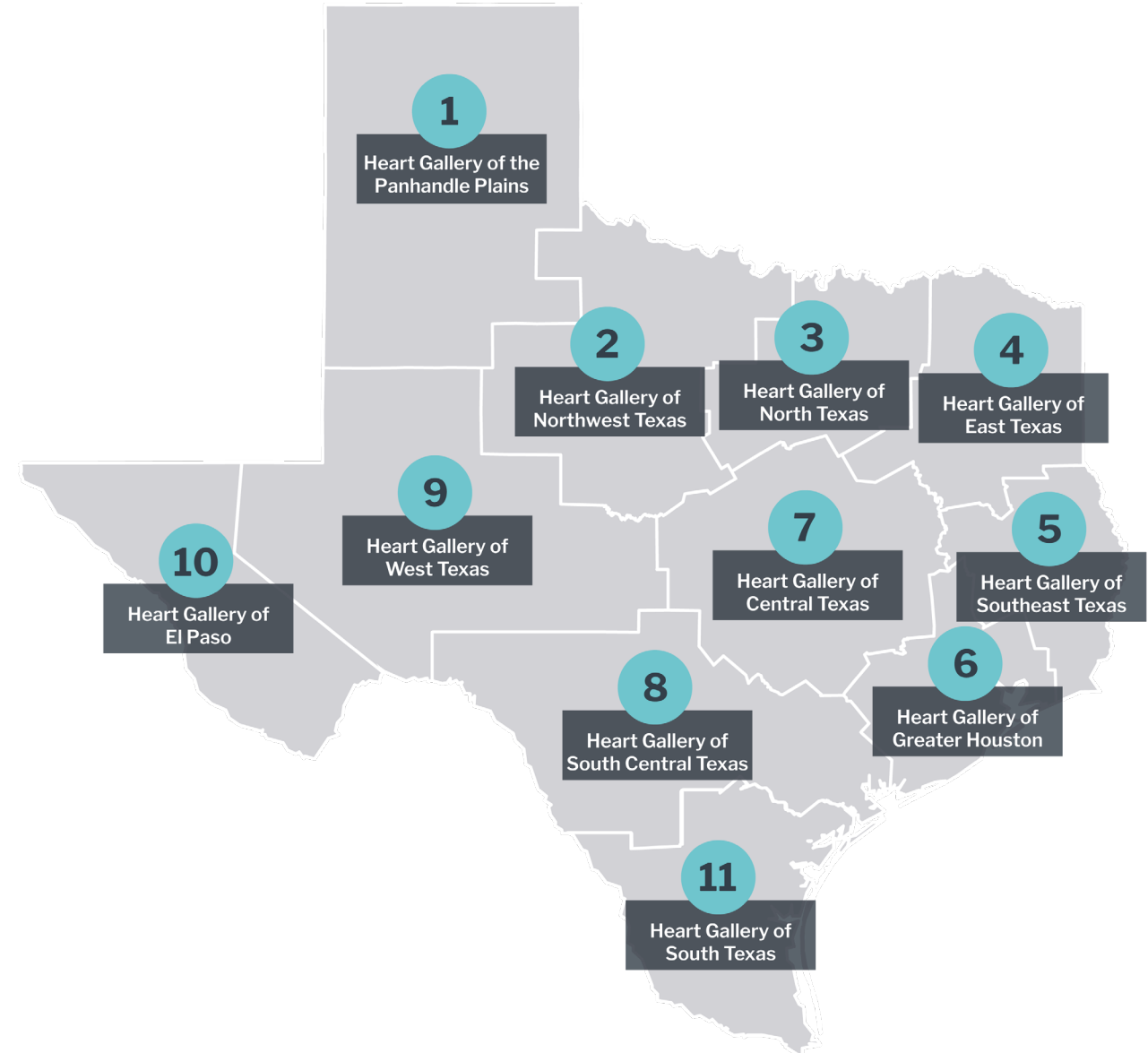
These youth need additional advocacy efforts to be adopted.

Portrait exhibits that illuminate the spirit and individuality of children who want to be adopted



Texas has committed **\$24 million** to expand the Heart Gallery model across the state and provide extensive post-adoption support and training.

What is Heart Gallery of Texas now?



Heart gallery
 EAST TEXAS


Heart gallery
 EAST TEXAS

This gallery is a program of The Fostering Collective that features portraits and stories of East Texas children in foster care who are waiting to be adopted. Each of these children have a unique story of resilience and hope, with dreams of being in a forever family.

Could God be calling you and your family to be a part of their story? We invite you to look beyond the frames and consider adoption, fostering, or advocating for them.

Together we can bring the hope of a family to these amazing children!


 A PROGRAM OF
 THE FOSTERING COLLECTIVE
View the entire gallery
HeartGalleryTX.org









Heart Gallery 2.0: More than just a photo

- Community engagement-focused
- Child-centered recruitment
- Training and education
- Ongoing post-adopt supports



Heart Gallery Metrics

July 2024 - June 2025



587

youth featured on Heart Gallery site

1,786

Heart Gallery exhibits throughout Texas

305

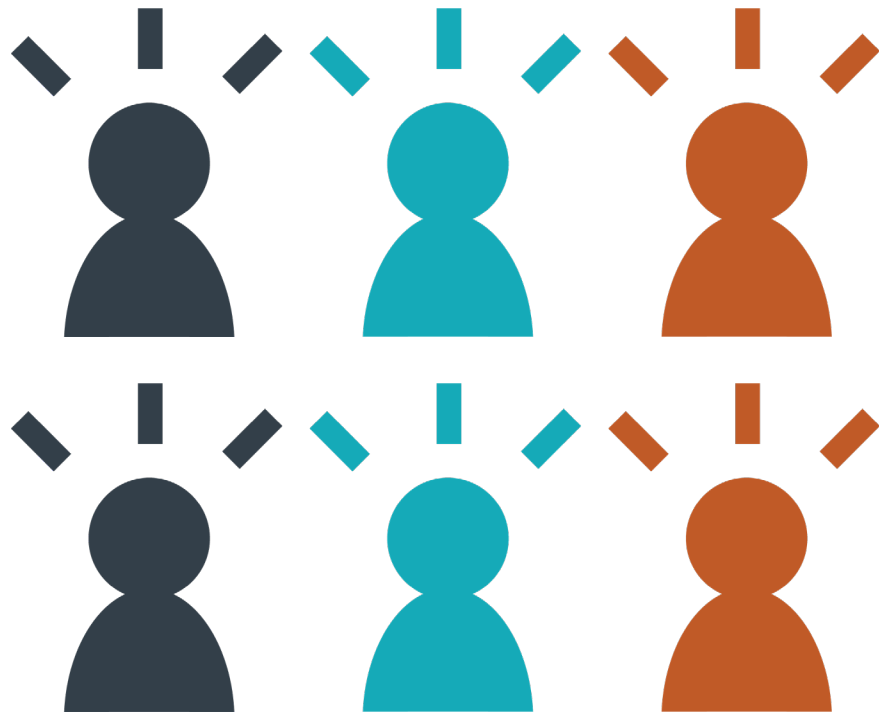
youth removed from the Heart Gallery due to placement

519

stakeholder meetings with **5,751** attendees

800

community outreach events with **97,204** attendees



51%

of featured youth have been
placed in an adoptive
placement

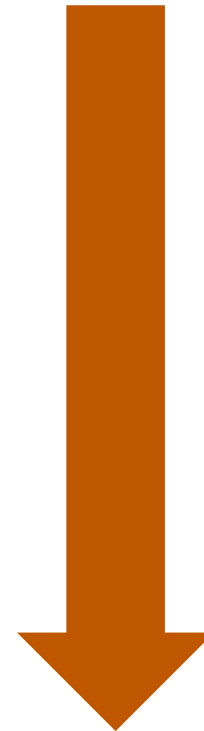
Our Goals:



Build community awareness & collaboration

Increase adoptions

Improve post-adopt services



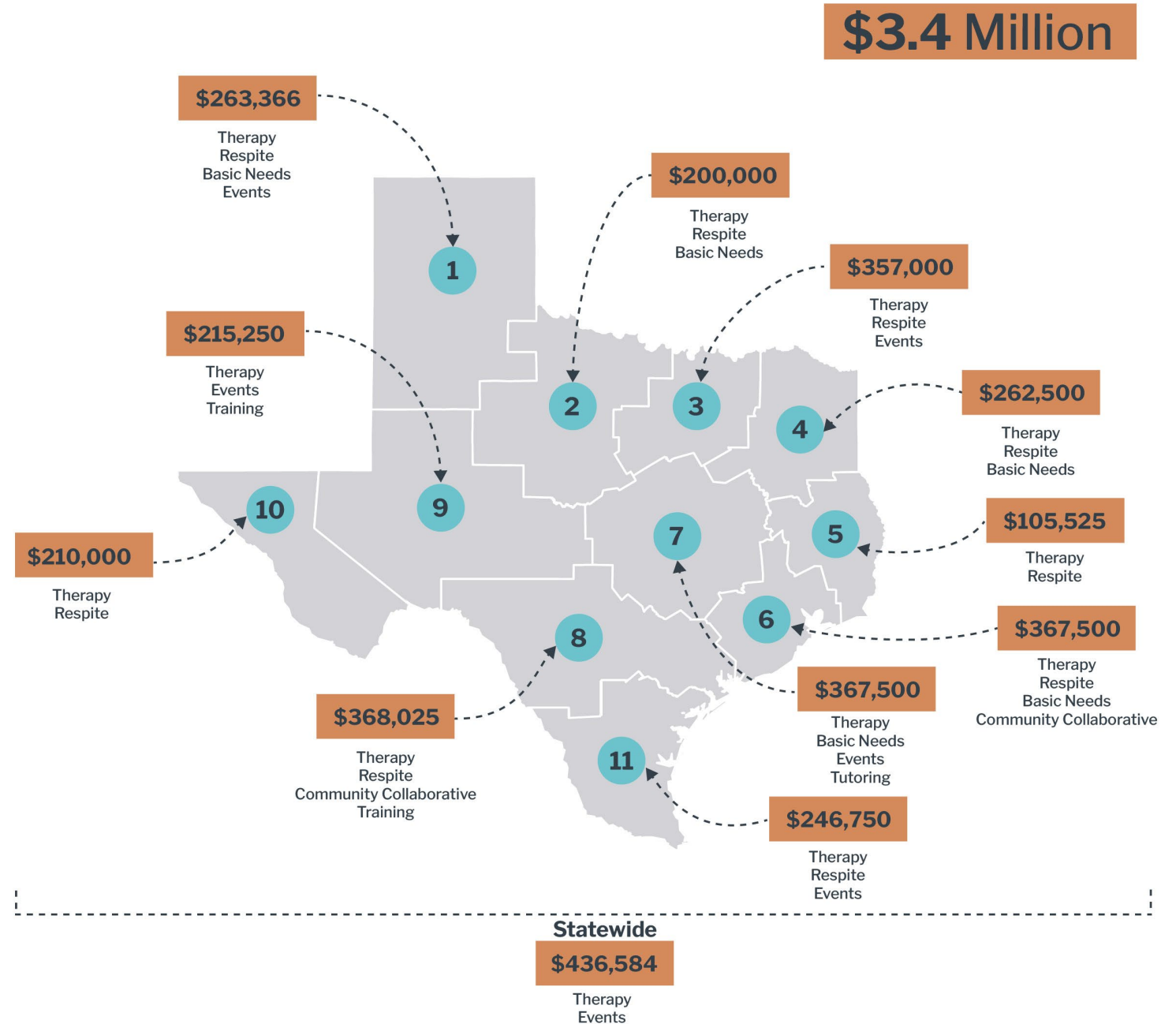
Child wait time in care

Children placed outside of their community

Youth aging out

Disrupted adoptions due to lack of support

2024 HGTX Post- Permanency Funding



Post Adoption Metrics

January 2025 - June 2025



788

families received basic or emergency assistance

1,537

clients received mental health services

162

families received respite services

493

youth funded to participate in normalcy activities

2,311

attendees in family bonding activities, events or camps

907

caregiver trainings with **1,512** attendees

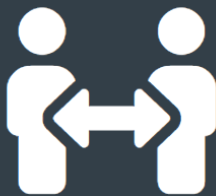
197

Support groups with **1,899** total attendees

Heart Galleries is your ally in adoption.

Building a family can sometimes take unexpected turns, and we know support matters long after adoption is finalized. That's why we partner with — **and help fund** — trusted local organizations across Texas who are ready to walk alongside you. These organizations provide **free** post-adoption services so you can focus less on challenges and more on building your new life together.

Navigate these local post-adoptive services in two ways:



Fill out our interest form

to connect with our Post-adopt Resource Specialist and receive personalized recommendations.



Browse post-adopt services

to find what your family needs among our vetted local services and supports.

How You Can Help

- Engage with your regional Heart Gallery
- Support Heart Gallery photo listings and understand timelines
 - Encourage child-centered engagement
 - Annual updates
 - TARE publication required first
- Encourage and facilitate seeking support
 - Remind families about free post-adopt supports in court
 - Include post-adopt flyers in exit packets or final orders
 - Ask about post-adopt access in review hearings

HEART GALLERY



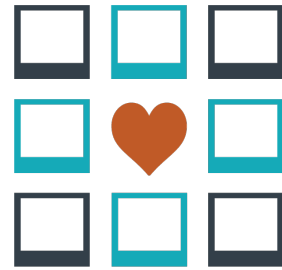
open the
door to
permanency



POST- ADOPTION



supports provide
stability and help
keep families strong



HEART GALLERIES OF TEXAS

Your allies in adoption.

Thank You!
