

# Partnership Eases Youth Transition

*Non-profit gives luggage to kids taken from their homes due to abuse and neglect*

SARASOTA, FLORIDA, UNITED STATES, May 3, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The [Heart Gallery](#) of Sarasota recently began distributing over 150 pieces of new carry-on size luggage to children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect. The urgency is in response to the overwhelming number of calls to the Florida Abuse Hotline. Last year, there were 7698 child abuse investigations in Sarasota, Manatee and DeSoto counties that resulted from those calls

The Heart Gallery of Sarasota, a non-profit agency responsible for finding permanent families for children who are in [foster care](#), instituted the luggage drives in 2015 and has partnered with Church of the Palms this year. Members of the church purchased new luggage and collected items to ease the transition for the children to a temporary placement.

"It has been a tremendous blessing and privilege for our church to host the luggage drive with the Heart Gallery. Our members feel a responsibility to care for children in our community," according to Sara Soboleski, Executive Pastor, Church of the Palms." When being removed from their homes, children have little time to collect their belongings and often have only a few things to call their own.

The Heart Gallery announced the luggage drive on two Sundays during services and the donations began pouring in. At the end of the two-week drive, there were nearly 50 teens in attendance for the Student Mission program to sort and pack comfort items and toiletries in the luggage. Conor Peters, Director of Student and Family Ministries, along with the students,



Church of the Palms Student Ministry Shows the finished luggage.

offered prayers that children in foster care will experience a feeling of belonging in a foster family.

When a child comes into care, Circuit 12 Child Protection Investigators (CPI's) make every effort to place children initially in the least restrictive placement, first searching for someone familiar to the child, like a relative or non-family member. In the event one is not readily available, the lead agency that manages the care and placement of children in foster care, the Safe Children Coalition, ideally places the youth with a foster family.

The option of last resort is a residential placement.

"There are always more foster children than homes for them. During the life of a case placements change and children are moved to more than one group home and foster family. The Heart Gallery identifies locations when the children are in transition, making luggage available to group homes, foster families and CPI's all year," according to Allison Juceam. The Heart Gallery's Executive Director.

There is little space for the luggage in the back of a police car or space at group homes or at the offices of Child Protective Services so the Heart Gallery is asking individuals or groups who want to donate luggage to contact them at [inquiries@heartgallerysarasota.org](mailto:inquiries@heartgallerysarasota.org). Please be certain the pieces are small carry-on size preferably with wheels to make it easier for the children.

About Heart Gallery of Sarasota: The Heart Gallery of Sarasota, Inc. is a 501C3 organization and was established in 2005 to bring our community's children into the light. The Heart Gallery of Sarasota has affected hundreds of adoptions in Sarasota, DeSoto and Manatee counties. We engage over 50 professional photographers who capture the child's character and spirit to attract the attention of prospective forever families. The success of the program is measured in the number of successful adoptions. Contact: Allison Juceam, Executive Director, Heart Gallery of Sarasota, 941-504-2135, [inquiries@heartgallerysarasota.org](mailto:inquiries@heartgallerysarasota.org) or Matthew Straeb, president, Heart Gallery of Sarasota, 954-850-6606, [mstraeb@gmail.com](mailto:mstraeb@gmail.com).

About Church of the Palms:

Church of the Palms is a community committed to God and to one another. Our shared life reflects our passion to follow Christ in all we do, whether that's feeding the hungry, advocating for and advancing the education of children, or simply loving one another well. Contact: Jackie Gomez, Communications Coordinator, 941-924-1323

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