

Cherishing the Child Calendar San Diego County

The Cherishing the Child Calendar project began as a unique partnership between San Diego County Adoptions (SDCA) and with community churches and agencies to find adoptive homes for children in foster care. The project sought to engage the ecumenical community in an ongoing effort to recruit adoptive families for the growing number of African-American/Biracial children being raised in foster care in San Diego County. The project endeavored to increase adoption awareness and support for adoptive and foster families in the community. The first Cherishing the Child Calendar project was published in 2000, San Diego County Adoptions launched an innovative annual calendar campaign, producing a wall size calendar that featured children available for adoption.

The calendar project was based on a model from the One Church, One Child Program started in 1981 by Rev. George H. Clements in Chicago at the Holy Angels Church, a predominantly Black Catholic Church. Clements' goal was to recruit Black adoptive parents through local churches. His One Church, One Child program spread widely and catalyzed the adoption of more than 100,000 African-American children nationwide. The One Church, One Child program published a calendar featuring waiting children with local firefighters and police officers thus serving as a model project for SDCA.

SDCA designated recruitment staff that was in regular communication with church leaders and attended churches several times per year to answer questions and recruit potential adoptive families. The staff began making partnerships with churches in the community which reflected a diversity of faiths, had strong community leaders and fairly large congregations. Relationships were developed with pastors and/or their representatives. This recruitment tool has made a significant impact in the community and raised public awareness regarding adoptions and the need for permanency for children in public foster care.

Once the churches understood the need that there were children in our local community who needed families, they agreed to support adoption recruitment in their own churches on an ongoing basis. Each participating pastor signed a letter of commitment that they would take an active role in promoting adoptions. SDCA sponsored several forums for pastors, both to unveil the calendar and to enlist the ongoing support of community leaders and pastors. In fact, Father George Clements was the keynote speaker at the 2001 Calendar Unveiling Ceremony.

In 2006 after 2 years of no calendar due to budget restraints, a local photographer, Lisa Peirce, contacted SDCA asking if we were still doing the calendar project. After some discussion she expressed her desire to be the photographer for the 2006 calendar. The partnership with Lisa took off and the calendar name changed to A Leap of Faith. The new name described the idea of a child being placed in an adoptive home and how faith plays a key role in the future of our children. Lisa Peirce offers a reduced rate for her professional services. As an artist she is extremely committed to finding adoptive homes for children in San Diego County and generous about her time and expertise. Children were chosen for this calendar to portray the range of ethnicities and ages of children in foster care waiting to be adopted.

In 2007, SDCA partnered with San Diego Chargers and CBS 8\KFMB-TV to increase the awareness of adoption by expanding the audience reach. This partnership was established based on SDCA's working relationship with CBS 8\KFMB-TV and their connections with the Chargers. SDCA's and CBS 8\KFMB on-going relationship was based on years of ad campaigns and weekly Adopt 8 segments featuring children needing adoptive homes on CBS. CBS 8\KFMB-TV called an initial meeting with the Chargers and SDCA. The Chargers agreed to be part of the Leap of Faith Calendar. The players donated their time to this community project. In addition the Charger players involved in the Calendar have donated autographed footballs, autographed community jerseys and game tickets to the children photographed and their families. SDCA continues to present at churches and use this venue to educate and recruit families. The Leap of Faith 2008 featured children in need of forever families with high-profile Charger players. SDCA has demonstrated its leadership in outreach through the Annual Calendar Campaign. This program has become a permanent fixture in the County's strategic plan, and its continued value is expected to increase through more adoptions, raised awareness within the whole community, and greater demand for the Calendar. For the 2007 Leap of Faith Calendar, we photographed 29 children and successfully matched 27 children with adoptive families. In 2008, Leap of Faith Calendar, we photographed 24 children. SDCA distributed 90,000 calendars in 2008. The project continues to be highly successful; nearly all the children pictured in the 2008 calendar were placed in permanent homes with families to call their own.

In 2009, SDCA and CBS 8\KFMB-TV have again teamed up again with the San Diego Chargers. The children truly enjoy participating in the calendar project. Either in a studio or on the Chargers training field it gives them a moment to shine and be number one.

The Leap of Faith Calendar is one way SDCA spotlight some of the wonderful children waiting to be adopted. SDCA asks people in the community to take action by placing this calendar in a prominent place where others can see the hope, vitality and longing reflected in the children featured. The goal of this project is to promote permanent and stable forever families for children in the child welfare system. The Calendar is also a superb outreach tool. Hanging in an office or at home, the children's photos are a catalyst for conversations to raise awareness of adoption issues. As a unique and tangible, take-away item, the Calendar is in high-demand as a hand-out at community events. It provides the media with an interest item for feature TV stories, and its popularity has generated great feedback from the community. The children who participate are proud to represent children waiting to be adopted and were celebrated at a Charger game on November 9th. The featured children and their families attended the game with tickets donated by the Chargers and received gift bags, including their own copy of the calendar, while staff distributed calendars to hundreds of attendees at the game.

Contributions towards the production of the 2009 calendar include donation of time from the Chargers, a reduced fee from the photographer, and funds from the National Football League and the County of San Diego.

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