

Dear Families, Friends, Supporters:

Blessings from CSSM during this year's Christmas season. Since 1953, Catholic Social Services of Montana has continually provided services to women experiencing unexpected pregnancies, and to couples struggling to expand their families. Our ministries give expectant parents the option of adoption. God has empowered these beautiful and loving families to blend into one. With pride and joy, we present the children of 2020; each one special in God's eyes.

***Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from Catholic Social Services of Montana
December 2020***



Alex and Aaron had already been on a long journey to begin their family. They had a few starts and stops that did not work out and then found Catholic Social Services. They were selected by a young expectant mother who was overwhelmed with her life and working hard to get back on her feet. Alex and Aaron offered her friendship, emotional support and a wonderful home for **Emily**. The journey to building a strong and open relationship was not always easy, but everyone remained committed to working together to figure it out, as they all knew it was the best thing for this baby. They have all grown close, have a good relationship, and the baby girl is thriving.

Jason and Hannah were thrilled when they got the call about a young lady who selected them to adopt her baby. Filled with nerves and excitement they met with her and found a young woman with whom they had many shared interests. They were able to offer support and connection and were thrilled to welcome **Ellis** into their home. Along with embracing their new baby, they have also worked to develop a respectful and healthy friendship with his mother. This wasn't always easy during a time of quarantines and distancing, but they have done a wonderful job of being available when the young woman needed to have that connection, but also stepping back when she needed some space.



Based on our commitment to Catholic social teaching, Catholic Social Services of Montana provides for works of advocacy, compassion, pastoral outreach, education, and social justice.

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Gene, Kim and Amelia were hoping for an addition to their family. They received the call and were off to the hospital. **Adilee** was born early, at only 25 weeks into the pregnancy. Christmas last year was spent traveling to the NICU for visits. She came home in February and is doing great! The two young girls keep their parents entertained and their family is now complete.



Dean and Carli approached their adoption journey with excited and open hearts. They were ready for whatever God may bring them. This came in the form of a 3-day old baby girl. Her mother was homeless and struggled just to get through each day. Her life was by every definition hard and often dangerous, but she loved her little girl so much and wanted the world for her. Dean and Carli stepped in and welcomed **Hattie** and accepted her mother right where she was, challenges and all. They were able to bring love and joy to that baby's life and also be friends and show true kindness to that mother who had experienced little kindness in her life. The baby girl flourished and not only were they able to develop a relationship with the baby's mother, but also her adult sister. So, when the day came that the adult sister found herself looking to place her baby for adoption, she immediately reached out to Dean and Carli! Thus, another beautiful little girl, **Ruby**, joined their family. Dean and Carli continue to have warm and caring relationships with both mothers and the little girls have filled their home with joy and laughter.



Kyle and Genesis are faith filled people that believe God has plans for them. Two adoption matches that fell through brought them sadness, but they still held on to faith. Although COVID brought a lot of challenges for many, it brought them joy in the form a beautiful baby girl, **Lilah**. Her mother had selected a family from Denver to adopt her baby, but with the quarantine, the family was unable to travel to Montana. So, while at the hospital, her mother sought out a local solution which led her to Kyle and Genesis. They woke up that morning going about life and went to bed with a beautiful little girl nestled in the bassinet next to them.



Colton, Toni Jo, Samara and Ember contacted CSSM to conduct their home study after being matched with a birth mother from another state. **Kyler** joined the family and has brought them so much joy. His big sisters couldn't wait to begin helping with the care of their new baby brother.



Our **Baby Boutique** in the Helena office is going strong with a change in procedures to accommodate physical distancing. As an essential agency, **CSSM has remained open throughout the pandemic to keep the boutique open along with all of our adoption services.** We continue to provide free diapers, wipes, clothing and hygiene supplies to families in need in the Helena area. We encourage our families to call ahead and we leave the requested supplies at the door to be picked up.



2020 has been a tough year for many of us, including non-profit organizations like Catholic Social Services of Montana. Placements in our Infant Adoption Program are down, and they were down even before the pandemic began. A reduction in placements means a reduction in our income. **We are looking for assistance from our donors, now more than ever. We need your help to keep our doors open so we can continue our mission to reach out to expectant parents with a message of hope and help and to give them the option of adoption for the precious life they carry.**

Please take a few minutes to read the letter on pages 10 and 11 of this newsletter written by a CSSM birth mother. Her story illustrates how CSSM was there for her during her pregnancy.

Building Montana Families since 1953

Catholic Social Services of Montana is a non-profit organization dedicated to advocating for and supporting the needs of babies, children, individuals, and couples by building and strengthening Montana families. We provide personalized adoption services to expectant and potential birth parents and families considering adoption as well as life-long support, compassion and professional guidance.

We are working hard every day to reach out to expectant parents that could use our support during their pregnancies. CSSM Social Workers assist expectant mothers whether they choose to make an adoption plan or not. We have upgraded our website to support both expectant parents and potential adoptive parents seeking information. We are getting the message out through radio announcements and parish bulletins. Our Board of Directors is working with both the Western and Eastern Montana dioceses to share CSSM's mission and seeking parishes to "adopt" CSSM.

Here are some ways your donations help CSSM:

\$35 pays for one hour of a Social Worker's time to counsel expectant birth mothers.

\$40 buys a box of diapers or two boxes of wipes

\$200 pays for a month of our adoption attorney's retainer

\$500 pays for a month of IT or Website services

\$1,000 buys TV or radio airtime to reach out to women considering abortion

\$2,000 pays for insurance on our company vehicle for one year

\$5,000 allows us to use a sliding fee scale for a potential adoptive couple

Your gifts support the lives of unborn children by providing caring support to women experiencing unplanned pregnancies.

There are so many ways you can help CSSM with our mission!

- Select CSSM as your **Amazon Smile** partner and every time you make a purchase at smile.Amazon.com, a donation will be made to CSSM by the Amazon Smile Foundation.
- Join our givers who donate on a regular schedule. Even small monthly donations add up and make a big difference for our organization.
- Donations can be made online at our website www.cssmt.org or mail checks to our office: Catholic Social Services of Montana; PO Box 907; Helena, MT 59624 or call our office at 406-442-4130 for more information.

We are truly grateful for our many friends, supporters and donors!

CSSM Staff and Coping with COVID-19



My name is Twila Costigan and I have been the Executive Director of CSSM since 2017. This past year has been an unprecedented time in my life. Probably in the lives of most people, but not for the human family. Our history is full of famines, plagues and challenging diseases like polio.

God has been with us every step and implores us "Do not be afraid". At CSSM we are boldly moving forward to reach out to women contemplating abortion and give them the option of adoption. Pregnancy clinics are reporting unprecedented prescriptions for mail order abortion pills and we have had fewer expectant parents contacting us about making an adoption plan, which drastically impacts our income. We have had to adapt as an agency, and we remain hopeful!

Due to budget issues over the past several years, we have had to lay off our Missoula Social Worker and are covering the Western part of the state from Helena. We have used Zoom to complete our home visits for new adoptive parents, relicensing for families in our Infant Adoption Pool, and our staff meetings. Our Helena office is open by appointment and we continue to gift diapers, wipes, clothes, toys, and supplies to parents in need in Helena. We have applied for and received a Payroll Protection Plan Loan (we are working on filing for forgiveness) and grants from the State of Montana for Nonprofits.

On a personal level COVID-19 has been challenging for me. I miss the music ministry in my home parish of Saint Mary Catholic Community, as well as the Journey and Walk to Emmaus communities in Helena. On the other hand, my husband and I were able to buy some land on the Boulder River and I enjoy my time there immensely. Balance! I find that I am more focused on gratitude than ever before; grateful for friends and family and all the blessings bestowed on us. I am very thankful to all of you who share your riches to facilitate CSSM's continued outreach...offering the hope of adoption across our great state of Montana!

My name is **Senja Linjanen** and I am the Executive Assistant. I make sure all files are completed and bills get paid, phones answered or voicemails returned. The background checks and Foster Care licensing for our couples is also part of what I do for CSSM. With the COVID-19 protocols in place, I am the one most people see at the office on a daily basis. I am thankful that we have been blessed to be able to keep our doors open during this challenging time. We of course have had to adapt to changes with our diaper clients especially. They call ahead and I put their diapers, wipes, and clothes on the front porch for them to pick up. My day to day routine really hasn't changed too much since I continue to work at the office. My hobbies include photography, hiking, spending time with my family and my dogs!



Hi! My name is **Jann Petek**, I am 60 years old and I love long walks in the rain...oops wrong writing. I am the social worker for the northern and middle sections of the state. It has been a crazy 2020 with COVID-19 added into the mix, but in many respects, it hasn't changed my life much. I have never separated my time into work time vs home time. It all just becomes life and I do what needs to be done when it needs to be done. There will always be hurting people and those in need regardless of what else happens in the world. I continue to meet with folks in person as much as I can because it is more difficult for me to meet by the tech options, however I have learned Zoom this past year...I guess you can teach an old dog new tricks! My wardrobe has become more comfortable as I mostly work from home these days. As a matter of fact, I am wearing a Christmas sweatshirt as I write this from my couch...Oh my mother will be rolling over in her grave "It's not even Thanksgiving yet!" I have done some direct placement of babies and one for our infant pool. I continue to do relicensing of adoptive parents. With the New Year approaching I am hopeful that things will cycle back upward, when you have been on the planet as long as I have been you realize that there are good times and bad and, in the end, "It will be what you make it."

Hello, my name is **Michelle Perlick**, and I am the social worker in our Billings office. 2020 has been a crazy and difficult year for almost everyone. The year has brought so much uncertainty and events that no one has experienced before. Like it has for many, it has created an interesting year for an adoption social worker. Some of those things have been hard and some have been good. Through it all we have tried to stay light and find laughter. I have found in my life that if you can find a smile and a chuckle in the darkest of moments, that it can help make the moment easier to bear. I learned the art or lack thereof, of a zoom call! Working in my home office/guest bedroom/ craft room/sewing room, I was thankful for zoom rooms, digital backdrops that hid what was behind me!!! Those of you talking to me never had to see the 10-foot pile of fabric looming behind me ready to collapse like an avalanche. Instead you were able to see a beautiful mountain scene... that I oddly pixelated in and out of at times! The video sometimes could be a bit blurry and jiggle as my phone was attached to a glamorous but functional card table. I sincerely hope none of you got too motion sick. And the dogs... oh the dogs... I am certain that you all were able to hear my wonderful pack of wiener dogs on numerous occasions as one is always barking at something, whining to get into the office, or stealing stuff and running out. I don't know how many calls I had that my son came in for help with something or my husband suddenly needed to know where the peanut butter was. Along with zoom calls our team was blessed with new technology to stay connected. We began using Microsoft Teams. There is no better way to express a confused moment or a laugh than sending a goofy GIF to a coworker. I added fun pictures to my coworker's profiles, just to give me a smile when they call or text me. Twila may or may not have a picture of a stuffed flamingo as her profile picture on my phone. Through all this craziness and fun, we have continued to be dedicated to being available for our CSSM families and children in every way we could. Not only serving families through adoption, but also just being a supportive and caring ear for those who are not faring COVID-19 well. I am proud to work for such a compassionate organization. We look forward to 2021 with hope for easier days for those we serve, and excitement for the new ways we will find to have laughter make all of our loads easier to bear. I wish you all a happy and laughter filled holiday and new year. I look forward to seeing you in person next year, that is if I survive the fabric avalanche!



My name is **Stacey Spears** and I am the part-time Administrative Assistant. I keep track of donations, incoming payments, and help plan our special events and fundraisers. When an infant is placed through our Infant Adoption program, I work on the necessary medical insurance and social security paperwork for the new baby. What a strange year this has been, especially with the transition to working remotely. As the year comes to a close, I miss some of our family's traditions that we have been unable to do this season. I was feeling sad about this recently and then I heard a fabulous sermon on Sunday about how God sent his light at the Christmas season to help us through dark times. I remain grateful for all my blessings, especially being together with my family and my work with CSSM. Our team at CSSM is a tight knit group and we work hard to support each other, our CSSM families, our clients, and the community every day.



Wendy's Wonderful Kids



Hi! My name is Katie Lamach. I've been with Catholic Social Services of Montana for the past 4.5 years. I love this agency and all the help and hope they bring to families! The people I get to work with are amazing and I thoroughly enjoy helping others. I consider all of them my friends. When I'm not working or traveling around the state, I enjoy spending time with my husband. We love to camp and try to get away as many weekends as we can when the weather permits. He's also teaching me to fly fish! I enjoy kayaking during the summer, spending time with my son who is a senior, and playing with my 2 Huskies and Karelian Bear Dog.

As the Wendy's Wonderful Kids Recruiter, I work with teenagers in foster care and help Child and Family Services find them adoptive homes. I accept referrals from CPS workers in the western half of Montana, but I travel all over the state to visit with the children each month. This year brought some changes to how I do things, though. I now conduct all meetings through Zoom and I have many virtual visits with kids. I currently have children placed in Anaconda, Butte, Kalispell, Whitefish, Columbia Falls, Great Falls, Missoula, Oregon, and Utah.

One of the children on my caseload is living with his grandmother and she will begin the guardianship process in February! Another child has been living with a foster family for more than 6 months and will begin the adoption process in March! A third child in Oregon is in a permanent placement and the foster parent plans to pursue adoption as soon as he meets the time period required by Montana and Oregon!

The services Wendy's Wonderful Kids Recruiters provide are extremely important for children in foster care. More than 130,000 children in the foster care system across the nation are waiting to be adopted. In Montana approximately 600 children are permanent wards of the State and waiting to find adoptive families. Wendy's Wonderful Kids believes every child is adoptable and every child deserves a safe, loving, and permanent family. Across the US, it is estimated that 20,532 children will age out of the foster care system without a family or home to call their own. Wendy's Wonderful Kids is trying to change those numbers. More than 9,000 children have been adopted through the Wendy's Wonderful Kids Program. If you would like more information about this program, please contact Katie Lamach at 406-442-4130 or 1-800-222-9383.



It is estimated that annually over 10,000 households contribute to the Diocese of Great Falls Billings Care and Share and the Diocese of Helena Annual Catholic Appeal in support of the ministry of Catholic Social Services of Montana. It is a privilege for appeal donors to contribute 21% of the overall CSSM budget, through annual appeal funding, to further the work of building and strengthening families all across Montana. *Together we do make a difference.*



Giving a Gift That Lasts Forever

Thank you for supporting our *Catholic Social Services of Montana Endowments*! Because of supporters like you, we are fortunate to have an endowment with the foundations for **both** Montana dioceses. Every gift to our endowments increases the amount Catholic Social Services of Montana receives this year, next year, and **forever** in support of our mission! No gift is ever too small.

Giving to our *CSSM Endowments* is simple – through the mail or securely online. Guidance is below. If you would like to make a *planned gift* for our *CSSM Endowments* that will qualify you for the 40% Montana Charitable Endowment Tax Credit, contact the respective Foundation for the diocese in which you live and they will be more than happy to help you! And we will be forever grateful.

Earnings from our endowments are used each year to help the individuals and families we assist daily. Without question, the most important things our endowments provide are “hope” and “security”. To know that a constant stream of income will be coming to our organization each year because of your generosity provides hope to those of us working and those of us being served by Catholic Social Services of Montana. And the guarantee of this supplement to our annual budget provides peace of mind and security. Thank you again!

The Catholic Foundation of Eastern Montana (Great Falls-Billings Diocese)

Judy Held, President
PO Box 1345
Great Falls, MT 59403
Secure online giving at www.catholicfoundationmt.org
(406) 315-1765
judy@catholicfoundationmt.org

The Foundation for the Diocese of Helena

P.O Box 1729
Helena, MT 59624
Secure online giving at www.fdoh.org
(406) 442-5820





The CSSM 21st Annual Golf Tournament took place at Bill Roberts Golf Course in Helena on July 10th. We weren't sure what to expect this year, but we had a few more golfers than last year and our sponsors definitely came through for us. We are so grateful for all of the golfers and donors that supported the tournament this summer when we really needed them!

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SAVE THE DATE ~ our next tournament will be held on Friday, July 9, 2021 at Bill Roberts Golf Course in Helena! We look forward to re-starting the Kalispell golf tournament in 2021, watch for information regarding both tournaments on our website at www.cssmt.org

PRIZE DONATIONS

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Woody's Car Wash



NEW THIS YEAR - We displayed our Major Sponsor and Hole Sponsor signs on the lawn in front of our office on 11th Avenue in Helena before and after the tournament to give them some well deserved extra promotion! We had so many sponsor signs we eventually had to rotate the displays to make sure all the signs were prominently featured.



**CHECK OUT OUR NEW WEBSITE
WWW.CSSMT.ORG**

A Letter from a CSSM Birth Mother

Dear expectant mother,

I don't know you, I don't know your story, and I don't know your situation. I don't know what events had to occur for you up until this point. However, I do know that there is a God who does know you. He knows your heart and He knows exactly what you're feeling. Even if right now, He may feel the most distant. Whatever you have heard, I will tell you that no adoption story is the same. Each story is as divine and unique and precious as that baby you are carrying.

I was 21 when I found out that I was pregnant. I asked one of my friends if she would go with me to my doctor's appointment at Planned Parenthood. I have never supported abortion even in my darkest hour, but I still trusted Planned Parenthood when it came to birth control and making sure my body was healthy. I was not mentally prepared when the words "you have a positive pregnancy test" dripped from the nurse's mouth. I was in such a state of shock that I didn't even believe that she was talking to me even though we were the only two in the room. Her voice was flat, almost as if she had a disappointed tone. I stumbled to find the words to respond but there was none. "Let us know if you would like to abort the fetus." That sounded like pure venom, even worse than the actual news I had just received.

I won't go into too much detail about my Planned Parenthood visit but I will tell you that I was not offered prenatal vitamins, I was not offered an ultra sound, and I was not offered prenatal care. Thankfully I was with my friend throughout this visit. As I was crying hysterically, telling her about my test results, my friend began to google other locations for an ultra sound. I did not know how far along or where to begin. My friend found LaVie. I immediately met with a nurse whom I will never forget. She prayed over me and reminded me that there were other options. Adoption has been on my heart since I was 14 years old. I used to have dreams of carrying other women's children. So when she mentioned adoption to me, I knew in my heart that this was what I was supposed to do.

I was 9 weeks along when I decided to place my baby in an open adoption. Once again, I had googled in a time of distress. Google brought me to Catholic Social Services and I immediately called them. They were so loving and understanding and set me up with Michelle, who became my social worker. The woman herself radiated love and encouragement and she didn't even have to speak.

Nobody understood my choice. I attended my doctor appointments by myself. I cried myself to sleep almost every single night. I reminded myself that God never makes mistakes and that something amazing would come out of this whole situation. I remembered seeing a profile of a couple on the Catholic Social Services website. I began praying for them and praying about them, the parents that would raise my child. I knew in my heart that God had specifically chosen them to raise my baby. They matched every single quality that I had prayed for.

The time came to meet them for the first time and to say that I was nervous was an understatement. How do you ask someone to raise your child? They were equally as anxious but they heard my story and they listened. That was all that I needed. Meeting them confirmed my decision and the reality that I would not be keeping the baby really set in. It was hard for me to think about going through with all of this. However, it was harder for me to imagine depriving my child of such a wholesome loving childhood when I sometimes couldn't even afford to feed myself. It wasn't about me anymore. It was about my baby.

My friend drove me to the hospital where I labored for 14 hours. My family was with me and so was my Social Worker, Michelle. She never left my side. Michelle called the expectant parents, and I could see the glowing in their eyes when they arrived. I will never forget the moment that I handed that newborn baby into his new father's arms. It's a type of happiness that can't ever be described or replaced.

I chose to let my son Milo sleep in the hospital room with his new adoptive parents. I figured it would be easier for them to learn his nightly routine but also easier for me to say goodbye. The first night was the hardest. It was the first time that I had been truly alone since finding out I was pregnant. All of the emotions of excitement and grief intertwined with each other and took over the pit of my stomach. Some people ask me if I ever considered changing my mind at this time. The answer is no and it is still no. I won't lie, I fantasized about taking him home with me and thinking about being a mother. However, all thoughts led back to the same one. It's not about me anymore.

There were 72 hours when Milo was mine. He had my last name and we shared matching wristbands. Three days later was the adoption ceremony. I was to sign over my rights as Milos's mother and place him in their arms. I cannot stress this enough when I say that this was the hardest thing that I have ever had to do. I cried throughout the whole process. I cried so hard I didn't even feel like I had tears left at times, and then more would resurface. I had written letters to the new parents and they had written some to me. I placed Milo in their arms and I will not lie to you when I say that the pain that I felt was so deep, it was as if I had died. My dad once referred to this day as attending a funeral.

I don't want to glamorize adoption as a fairytale with a beautiful ending that never produced any pain. There was more pain than one can comprehend. However, making the decision to sign those papers and walk away was the best decision I have ever made in my entire life because it gave my son a chance to have the life that he deserves. I'm not saying that single mothers can't make it work. They can and they are strong and they are courageous in their own way. I respect them. However, I knew in my heart that this was what was best for me and my son.

I saw my baby boy for the first time after three months. I was so nervous and excited that I couldn't even control myself. I tell you dear mother, he did not forget me. I thought that as a baby, he probably wouldn't even remember me. Milo gazed at me with full attention at the sound of my voice as if he knew exactly who I was and what I was saying to him. He was safe. He was calm and I could tell that this new mother had done her best to love him extra on my behalf.

Milo is now three years old. He is all boy and he marches to the beat of his own drum. Milo likes to read books, play with his puppy, and go with his dad to work cows. He goes everywhere with his daddy and the bond between them is what reminds me every day that I made the right choice. Milos's mom has become a sister to me. I receive pictures from her almost every single day and she always makes sure to include me on any new behavioral or health changes. She never fails to include me and has made it very clear that I am welcome to visit whenever and for however long I please. Milos's parents have become a part of my family and I love them wholeheartedly.

Milo didn't just receive new parents. Milo now has three parents. He has three sets of grandparents, four sets of great grandparents, multiple aunts and uncles, and countless cousins. Adoption is more than just you, your baby, and the new parents. Adoption is the interweaving of multiple families coming together to raise a child.

Whatever you decide, dear mother is up to you. I hope only the best for you and your baby. At Catholic Social Services you will be loved and you will be treated with kindness and respect. Please don't ever hesitate to reach out or speak with a birth mother. We are often labeled as heartless or careless, but I can assure you that my fellow birth mothers are the most loving, dedicated, and courageous women I have ever met. I pray for you and your baby as you read this, that you will find peace and love, and that the Father would comfort you and guide you in your decision making. He will lead you and He will not leave your side. You are not alone. All my best.



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