

Dear Families, Friends, Supporters:

Blessings from CSSM during this year's Christmas season. Since 1953, Catholic Social Services has continually provided services to women experiencing unexpected pregnancies, and to couples struggling to expand their families. Through our ministry of providing help and creating hope, God has enabled these beautiful and loving families to blend into one. With pride and joy we present the children of 2018; each one special in God's eyes.

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

December 2018



Nick and Sarah were in the holiday swing in 2017 when they received a call that changed their holiday plans. They had been chosen by a birth mother and needed to go out of town to see their son, Francis, who had been born at only two pounds. There were days of driving back and forth to the hospital and Christmas was spent in the NICU last year. Francis is now a healthy, growing boy who has brought much love to the family. His big sister, Elizabeth just loves to help take care of him.

Matt and Carrie were foster parents for many years and decided that they were ready for children of their own. They were chosen by a birth mother and their daughter Sarah Grace was born. She has medical issues which require a high level of supervision and they are happy to be available for her needs. They interact weekly with her birth mother and are content to have her participate in sharing pictures and talking on the phone. She truly lives up to her middle name as she graces the world with her quick smile and happy go lucky presence.



Joe and Shiloh waited a long time for an adoptive match. After a couple of missed placements, they were selected by a young mother. The connection between not only the mother but her family was instantly strong, and they both realized that the long wait and missed placements all had to happen, so that this child Ethan, who was meant to be theirs, could be placed with them.

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.

A Look Inside:

Our Placements this year, pages 1-3

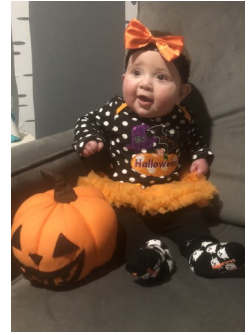
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Paul and Heather experienced the disappointment and pain of a birth mother having a change of heart. This experience moved them to take a break from the adoptive parent pool while they decided how they would pursue growing their family. Then a family friend shared with them news of a young teen birth mother who was not ready to parent and was seeking adoption. Paul and Heather met with this young woman with the help and support of CSSM, and moved through an adoption plan. Baby Eva has brought so much joy into their home helping them to heal from their previous losses and disappointments.



Joseph and Lise knew the joy that adoption could bring to their home, as they had two beautiful children as a result of the gift of adoption. Despite the happiness in their family they felt like someone was missing. They were selected by a young couple who were just not ready to parent a baby. After Matthew joined their family, Joseph, Lise, and both of their children feel that their family is complete.



Adam and Sara were not expecting “the call” and Sara was hiking in California. She saw the first pictures of her new daughter, Bethany, from the top of a mountain (the only place cell service would work). Adam bravely soldiered on as a “single” dad while the nurses taught him all of the care taking tasks. Since then they have been together as a family and make a great team for Bethany. They have a positive relationship with her birth mother and keep in contact regularly. They finalized her adoption at the Adoption Celebration this year.

Chris and Tracy let their foster care license lapse as they thought they were done raising children. They had their daughter, Bristol, and were completely happy with their family life. After thinking it through some more, Bristol needed a sibling, so they began the process from scratch again. It took a long time to get paperwork and a new home study completed, but once they were in the pool they were chosen by a birth mother in less than a month. Their new daughter Paisley joined the family. Tracy was so excited as she got to be present for ultrasounds and in the room for the labor and delivery. Paisley has delighted the family over the past several months with her easy-going nature and she definitely looks up to her big sister. They have a wonderful relationship with the birth family where they do overnight visits, splash park trips and special occasions. They finalized at the Adoption Celebration this year.



Rex and Lynlea were thrilled to fly across the country when their son Jay was born. It was a quick match and placement. They met the birth family, took pictures and gathered as much information as they could before bringing Jay home. Both parents fell completely in love with him from the start and they continue to see him as the light of their lives.

Casey, Tiffany, Harlee and Weston had just been going about their daily lives when Tiffany was contacted by a friend who was expecting. She asked if they would be able to adopt her child. They had not really given any thought to raising another child, but when the opportunity arose they could not say “no”. Their son Daxton joined the family and it has been nothing but smiles since.

Matthew and Sarah's hearts and home were so open to having another child, but they were unsure of how that desire would come to be, until they were contacted by friends that had a family member seeking an adoptive placement for her baby. Matthew and Sarah met with her and realized this was their path. They not only offered their home and hearts to sweet baby Daisy; their kindness and support comforted another family as they dealt with the grief and loss of placing a child into an adoptive placement.



Rick and Cindy believed that the dream of having another child had passed them by. They moved into living their lives accepting that their family was their daughter, son in law and two amazing grandchildren. Then during dinner one night they received a phone call. Their niece was expecting a baby within the month and she wanted them to adopt her. Ashleigh has been a beautiful surprise that has brought so much joy and life to their home.

Rabbi Chaim and Chava are well known in the Montana Jewish community for their many adoptions. This is how a birth mother came to approach them to ask if they might be able to adopt one more. They have a large family and a lot of love to go around so of course the answer was "yes". Chana joined her brothers and sisters, Chaya, Zeesy, and Menny and was welcomed with open arms into the family.



Chad and Jessica had been blogging about their infertility struggles when an old friend of Jessica's saw the blog and contacted them to say she was pregnant and wanted them to raise her child. Chad and Jessica were very excited and traveled out of state to bring their son Malachi home to Montana. Chad became a stay at home dad and since then they have been enjoying westerns on TV until the time comes that they can hunt and fish together. His big sister Jayleigh loves to entertain and care for him when she can. Malachi has brought great joy to the family and they don't know what they would do without him.



Mark and Ashley had a nice Labor Day weekend in 2017. It was made even *more* special though when, two days later, they received the call that their daughter had been born on Labor Day and that her birth mother had chosen them to parent Brielle! Immediately, they traveled to Las Vegas to meet Brielle and her birth mother. Shortly after that, they brought home their first child! Brielle joins this active family in everything they do, and every day together brings new adventure and joy!

John and Tara's family appeared to be full to those looking in. God had blessed them with three amazing sons. Their hearts however were still missing someone. That someone came in the form of Millie. Millie's mother was incarcerated and unable to parent her. A mutual friend connected them, and John and Tara not only became parents to a beautiful girl, they were able to offer support to Millie's birth mother, as she worked through a difficult time.



Patrick and Kera heard a birth mother was pregnant and looking to make an adoption plan from her brother. They met with her and began working through the process. Their son Jack was born and they traveled out of state to be there for the birth. His older sisters Haidyn, Reese and Nora couldn't wait to bring him home and made the trip as well. Unfortunately, because of interstate rules they could not bring him home for almost a month. They patiently waited for the paperwork to get figured out and received news on Valentines Day that they could return home with Jack. They couldn't think of a better gift of love.

A Message from the CSSM Staff

Seasons greetings to all of you! It's been quite a year for CSSM! Our team members continue to support one another as we work to fulfill our Mission and remain grounded in our commitment to human dignity, the common good of all and the care of people who are poor and vulnerable.

Since our last newsletter we placed twelve infants into approved adoptive homes. To replenish our pool of potential adoptive families, we had nine couples attend our Fall workshop in September. We also almost tripled our Community Outreach in Helena of diapers serving a total of 83 families and 196 children with 17,604 diapers. The Baby Boutique is alive and well. We give clothes, cribs, toys, strollers, bottles, lotion, shampoo etc. to anyone who asks...if we have it in our office, it is theirs. We are very grateful to those who donate to our Diaper Bank and Baby Boutique, especially to the Helena Diocese Aid to the Needy Fund for an additional \$1,000 to buy diapers and wipes this fall and the Lenten giving of Our Lady of the Valley in Helena.

We had several successful fundraisers; golf tournaments in Helena and Kalispell, and a new dueling pianos event in Missoula! Thank you to Saint Mary Catholic Community, The Cathedral of Helena, St. Francis Xavier and Blessed Trinity in Missoula, and the Knights of Columbus Councils of Flathead Valley for their steadfast support!

In November, National Adoption Awareness Month, adoption celebrations were held in Billings, Helena and Missoula and new adoptive families were joined together legally as they finalized their adoptions. This is always such a wonderful time for everyone involved in the ceremonies! Currently, CSSM social workers are focusing on expanding and refining our reach throughout Montana, especially as it pertains to providing services to expectant parents. We're also always making our way through home studies, post placement evaluations and expectant parent counseling.

We are approaching a time of year that can be incredibly joyful for many of you and quite painful for others. For those who find themselves struggling with the waiting process and feeling very tender, we at CSSM are continuously praying for you and wishing you peace and comfort. We invite you to be gentle with yourselves and celebrate other joys in your life, knowing that things can (and often do) change in an instant.

May you be filled with the spirit of gratitude for the year past

and know the Gift of Hope for the year to come.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

From our Social Workers:

Jenny (Missoula), Michelle (Billings), Jann (Helena), and

Katie (Wendy's Wonderful Kids).

Our support staff in Helena:

Senja, Stacey, and Allison

Our Executive Director: Twila



Wendy's Wonderful Kids

Katie Lamach is the Wendy's Wonderful Kids Recruiter for the western half of Montana. She regularly travels to Anaconda, Great Falls, Missoula, Libby, Kalispell, Hamilton, and Trout Creek in order to meet with children and caregivers. Katie had a few children featured on the CBS news segment, A Waiting Child. One of those children has been matched with a family that has a history of foster care adoption. The mother saw the news segment and said she instantly knew the girl featured was meant to be her daughter. A slow transition into her home is currently taking place.

Two adoptions took place this year. A child in Libby was adopted by a family that is utterly committed to him. They traveled from Libby to Kalispell every weekend for over a year to see him while he received treatment. Another child was adopted in Missoula. In 2017, this child received recognition for being a Montana Foster Child of the Year because of his improvement once placed in a family.

Katie currently has 6 children in homes that are slowly moving toward adoption. Three of those children wish to be adopted after the age of 18, and the parents are supportive of the request.

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, over 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 7,000 children have been adopted through the Wendy's Wonderful Kids Program. If you would like to learn more about adoption of a child from foster care, 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.*

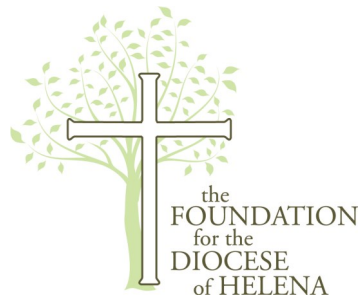
Thank you for supporting our *Catholic Social Services of Montana Endowments!* Because of supporters like you, we are fortunate to have an endowment with the foundations for **both** Montana dioceses. Every gift to our endowments increases the amount Catholic Social Services of Montana receives this 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 Foundation for the Diocese of Helena

Jeanne Saarinen, Executive Director
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Helena, MT 59624
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jsaarinen@diocesehelena.org



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

Judy Held, President
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Great Falls, MT 59403
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An Adoptive Family's Story

My mother waited until his 1st birthday. It was that day after the long haul with cancer she drifted into the unconscious, to die four days later. A beautiful light glowed through the window as we sang happy birthday to him with his sunshine cake. We celebrated living and dying and everything in between. I remember my mother saying... "I can go now, he is here". While we poured ourselves into this gift, her words gave me pause and I contemplated... was it his purpose to heal our wounds? It appeared God's miraculous plan was indeed timely, and we embraced that sunshine he brought to all our lives. We nicknamed him "BURST" as he joyfully clapped uncontrollably. He was a happy baby, he was embraced and loved by strangers and everyone knowing our adoption journey. I am so grateful that Mom got to hold him and believe he extended her life by being in our world. Their time brief but powerful.

As he grew into toddler, those bursts evolved into a full throttle mover and shaker. Our older son was quiet, calm, less physical and more intellectual. We had witnessed loads of active toddler boys, but whoosh, this felt like a storm. Our best friends with 4 boys giggled at the constant shenanigans. Everywhere we went, people shared a funny story about him. They would say, this is just normal 2 year old behavior. Massive emotions, destroying things in a blink, he's just a high energy normal 3 year old boy! We laughed hesitantly, my radar pulsing. His beautiful pre-school would write journal entries to let parents know the details of the day. While there were always positives, I began to feel anxiety, as more often there were pages of difficult behaviors. Some days I would feel teary and wondered why I took it all so personally. I came to understand that with adoption, this exquisite baby being entrusted to us... I felt some deeper sense of responsibility to his birth family and the universe to do it well. It was as if his struggles reflected our failures in parenting and this a sensitive place of vulnerability. I felt guilty because there were moments of great uncertainty. I simply didn't know what he needed and this deep love wasn't enough to settle him. I allowed these perplexing feelings so that they could move through me with gentleness.

He turned 4 and as we hoped for more calm, something seemed to ramp up. His body always moving and more chaotic, aggressive behaviors emerged. Fighting constantly with brother, even bigger emotions, and a discovery of the word "hate". How could this be, when all we have ever known is LOVE, LOVE, LOVE? As each day seemed harder for him, our fear grew like a monster under the bed getting ready to scare. A new pre-school environment unraveling him, I started to feel unsettled all the time. Trusted friends expressed kind concern and others conveyed they "didn't know how we did it 24/7." Ouch. It was as if our sweet little "BURST" was more like grenade, ready to explode at any time. The unpredictability felt more than the normal responses of young children and his spinning became exhaustive.

In all this discomfort we were committed to a birth family reunion. His reaction to birth Mom was always unique, different than how he connected with anyone. His body and soul knew something of this woman, something prevailing. This particular time he acted out with odd behaviors and I simply named it... that WOW, "he knows something profound here". After our brief visit I took him

to soak, to connect, to calm us both. The experience of seeing her still brings heaps of emotions, lovely and challenging. I was shocked as he swam away from me with peace in his body. He would wave, swim on and then circle back. His entire being was calm. I knew in my bones that he received something from just smelling her and hearing her voice. Medicine. This was the womb he knew. And although this big hearted, kind young woman did her best, there were moments in her pregnancy journey of homelessness, toxic relationship, mental illness, and extreme anxiety. That womb full of stress hormones penetrating his body and being, forming, wiring, creating.

What I have come to understand is this. THERE IS A WOUND. For us, it began in the womb. And even with all the love from birth and adoptive families working so kindly with God's grace... there is wound. She and I cared for him together that first night in the hospital. We watched the sun set and rise and held him and each other. And then, as we agreed, she was gone. I honestly can't imagine what it is like to abruptly lose the smell, the voice, the body, the love of what was known all those months in the womb. As if birth into this world isn't change enough, there is additional rupture no matter how beautifully we love them.

I reflect back and realize he never really slept that well. He is constantly seeking attention and reassurances. He often yells from wherever he is in the house... "Mom? I LOVE YOU!" While my heart melts, it is as if he is reminding himself constantly that he is loved. Maybe his expression of the "hate word" is that THIS HAS BEEN HARD. Maybe he spins chaotically to feel that swirling from the womb. Looking back, it was never really easy. I feel ashamed that I ever thought it would be simple. I think we are so blinded by love when we receive them, we forget the complexities of adoption. For that, I forgive myself. Miscarriages, waiting years to be chosen, waiting 72 hours for signed papers, a potential birth father popping up before finalization... all of which lending new compassion, more depth, and further humility. These are the qualities we see in the eyes of adoption families. We are extremely blessed to be in community with kind people in this extraordinary journey. Our most cherished friends share in these wounds and gifts as families.

Our son needs so much more and while we don't have all the answers and may never... I think back to my original question. Is it his purpose to heal us? It seems such a selfish inquiry and I know with the utmost faith and certainty - WE ARE ALL HERE TO HEAL EACH OTHER. We will give everything we have, bound by love to support him, calm him, heal, and guide. Just like all families, we experience beautiful joys and days that are just darn hard. We have started therapy, body work and open communication with trusted resource. In church, on mountain top, or inside the quiet of our home, we are always praying and listening for God's loving guidance. As I began to reach to other adoptive families, I am often met with tears. Tears of understanding, tears of empathy, tears of knowing something beyond. These layers of discovery include heart-wrenching struggle and remarkable gift. They are the unique intricacies of the adoption journey. Let us remember we are never alone and confront them together. We are always with hope and belief in healing.

The CSSM 19th Annual Spring Back to Life Golf Tournament took place at Fox Ridge Golf Course in Helena on July 13th. CSSM would like to recognize all the generous sponsors that helped make this year's tournament a huge success!

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This fall, CSSM partnered with the Montana Hope Project for a new fundraiser in Missoula - Dueling Pianos: A Gala Benefiting Montana Children. This raucous event had attendees laughing, dancing and singing along as two piano players from Fun Pianos entertained the crowd. We plan to hold the event in Missoula again in October 2019. You don't want to miss out on the fun, watch our website for details as we get closer to event. **Thank you to our amazing sponsors that helped get this fundraiser off the ground for its inaugural year!**

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Thanks to the Knights of Columbus Councils of Flathead Valley, CSSM benefited from a new golf tournament in Kalispell this year, the 1st Annual NW Charity Golf tournament. The tournament was held at the Village Greens Golf Course in September.

We offer a big thank you to the Knights of Columbus, the players and all the sponsors!

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PRIZES AND RAFFLE SPONSORS

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There are many ways you can help CSSM with our mission and commitment to human dignity, the common good of all, and the care of people who are poor and vulnerable.

- We hope to purchase a more reliable vehicle for our Social Workers to get around this great state, especially now that winter is here. Our agency vehicle has over 200,000 miles on it. Our Social Workers meet with birth mothers and adoptive parents anywhere in Montana they are needed.
- 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.
- Donate to our Baby Boutique that is filled with diapers, wipes, clothing and other baby items to share with folks in the Helena community that need help. Last year we gave out over 17,000 diapers! A wish list of items is at the bottom of the page.
- Join our monthly and weekly givers that donate on a regular schedule. Even a small monthly donation adds up and makes a 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 so very grateful for our many friends and donors! We recognize the multiple claims on your resources, all for worthy causes, and we are honored our supporters have chosen CSSM.

MANY THANKS TO OUR MONTHLY AND WEEKLY DONORS!

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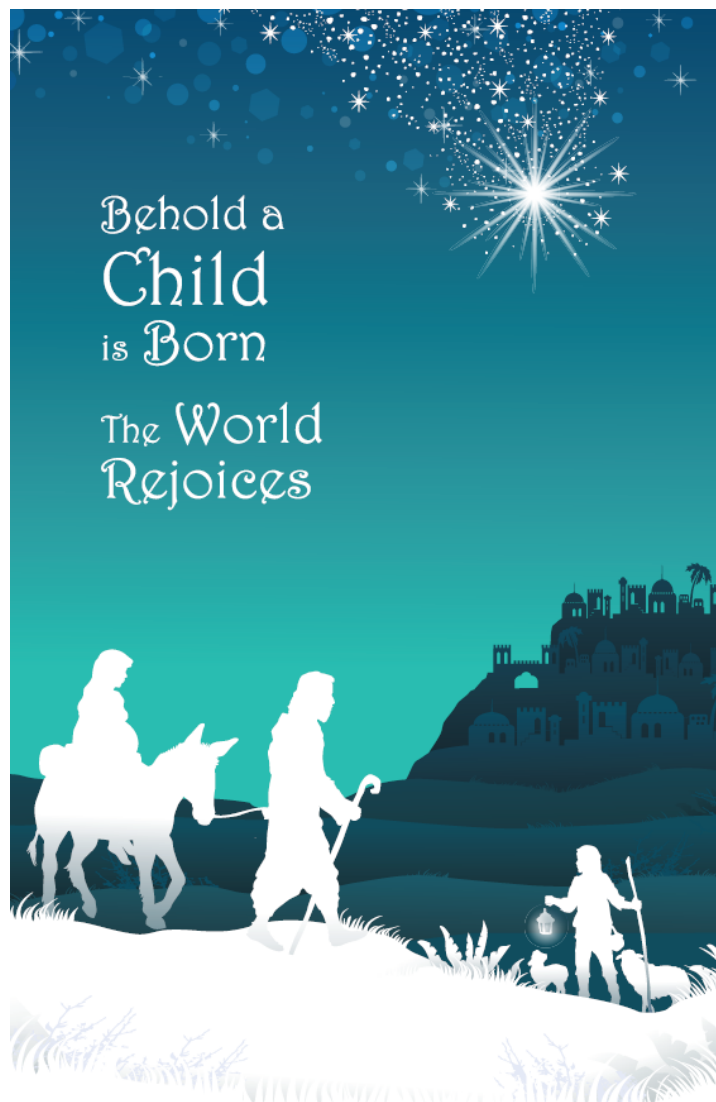
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