

nonprofit }



Changed lives Meet the **BROWN'S**

By **MARY BRYAN**
Photos by **RYA DIEDE**

Ever consider providing foster care to a child in need? Child Bridge has a simple and focused mission... to find and support foster and adoptive families for Montana children in need.

There are a record number of children coming into foster care and over time, some of these children become in need of permanent families. Even when children need permanent families, the journey begins by the family fostering the children first. It's here, that the simple mission of Child Bridge changes lives. The stories of transformation are powerful and inspiring.... like the Brown family. This special Flathead family were able to offer permanency and stability when 3 children's temporary care needs became permanent.

Tell us about your family:

We're Marcus and Kim Brown, and we have five amazing children. Many of our children are homeschooled, so we are busy! Jake, 12, loves creating with Legos and is always on the lookout for his next Nerf battle. Lizzy, also 12, enjoys writing stories as well as learning and researching topics, especially about animals. Josh, 10, is an artist and want-to-be gymnast. He is creative and causes us great joy with his spunky, neon personality. Tory, 8, is our dramatic, charismatic 3rd grade artist. She is a bundle of wonderful personality and spreads it wherever she goes. Jimmy, 5, is our youngest and is all boy. He is a preschooler that enjoys super heroes, cars, Nerf, and playing with his big brothers.

Where you live:
Kalispell, MT

What activities do you enjoy as a family?

We like to be outside, no matter the season. We enjoy bike riding, hiking, kayaking, snow skiing, or going for walks with our dogs. We also have fun hanging out playing board or card games and watching movies.

What intrigued you about adding to your family with adoption?

MARCUS: We had discussed adoption before we were even married. We knew there were so many kids, locally, that didn't have homes and we'd always felt called to do something about it. After Kim's two difficult pregnancies, it was further confirmation, and we knew if we wanted more children we would need to take another path.

KIM: I have considered adoption most of my life, even before I met Marcus. My maternal grandfather was raised in an orphanage and the negative affects of it on him were obvious. My paternal grandmother was adopted as a 2-year-old after her mother passed and her father wasn't sure he could care for her properly. She was quite well-adjusted after her adoption. Seeing the differences between my grandparents was the start of my journey towards adoption.

Marcus and I had discussed adoption before we were married. There were so many domestic children that needed homes and though many of our friends were looking overseas to adopt, we both felt led to the foster system.

After our training, we had multiple calls regarding children that needed homes. Some as foster placements, some for adoption. I remember bawling in the social worker's office because I didn't feel we were the right family for one child. Looking back, I realize that was the best decision we could have made for the child and our family. These children need a home, but that doesn't mean ours was necessarily the right fit.

JAKE: I was excited about getting a little brother.

JOSH: I wanted to adopt because I only had one sibling and I wanted more kids to play with.

How were you introduced to Child Bridge?
We heard Child Bridge speak at our church, East-haven Baptist Church, in 2011. It was heartbreaking to see and hear the stories of the children in our area that needed loving, stable homes. Their work reminded us again of the need, and of the shortage of available families to offer strong foster placements.

How was the transition for your family?

MARCUS: The honeymoon stage was easy. Then it became much more challenging with multiple children with special needs. We tried to keep active and find different things to do, so there was limited downtime. Finding activities that most of the family likes is key. You need to have some fun, but not all the time. That would be unrealistic. We like to go for bike rides in the summer and snow skiing in the winter. It has been important to not force any of the kids (most of the time) so they will enjoy it, and I often take some for a ski or ride. As a family, we serve at the soup kitchen and we help with a kids summer camp. Activities

Marcus and I had discussed adoption before we were married. There were so many domestic children that needed homes and though many of our friends were looking overseas to adopt, we both felt led to the foster system.



like these help to take the focus off of the kids (all of them) and give them a chance to focus on others. I strongly recommend that you find volunteer activities as a family.

KIM: When we first met Lizzy, Tory and Jimmy in August 2014, we instantly felt a connection to them. They were still foster children, so though we were becoming attached, we were prepared that they may not be with us permanently. As time and circumstances progressed, so did the difficulties. We had two children in particular that struggled to mesh as family. After one incident, we gave them an opportunity to bond, by bucking bales. After loading bales together that evening, they realized they better learn to work together or we'd find more ways to help their relationship!

Though Marcus and I knew we were in the right place, we didn't always know how we'd make it. Jake and Josh assured us on more than one occasion that the kids were meant to be in our family and that they were now their siblings. The boys' support and confidence was critical when Marcus and I were struggling.

Through many hours of talking and supporting the kids, we have come through some serious issues. Facing the problems and the hard stuff is not easy, but it is necessary to heal, grow, and move forward.

What is the most positive change that has occurred in your family dynamics?

MARCUS: Learning to deal with others in a positive way, even when it's difficult. We have all wanted to give up at one time or another. That would be the easy thing to do, but not the right thing to do. On the other side of the struggles we have become strong together and supportive of each other, which has showed up at the most unexpected times. One of the boys was very angry with the girls and claimed to not like them at all. However, when the kids received a sad, but also very good letter from their biological

mom he went over to comfort one of the girls who had taken it particularly hard. I will never forget that moment, because I felt like we were going to make it and we would all be ok. Don't miss those moments, keep your camera close, because they will sneak up on you.

KIM: Our relationship with Christ has strengthened through the struggles. I also feel like all of us have grown as individuals. Becoming stronger in our own roles and learning to persevere when times are tough. Marcus and I are better parents. Jake and Josh are more independent, compassionate young men. Lizzy, Tory and Jimmy are more secure and truly feel like they belong in our family.

We have learned a lot the past year and a half. We love to pay it forward and support those around us walking a similar path. Our kids would like us to adopt more... But Daddy's not so sure about that!

JAKE: I get to play with Jimmy! I also have a better relationship with God because of everything I've been through.

LIZZY: I think we've grown closer to God. We have become stronger as a family.

JOSH: That Tory is my sister!

TORY: That my mom and dad would get to experience having daughters!!

Did you have a strong support system through family and Child Bridge?

MARCUS: Yes, church family and our Child Bridge family. We don't have any biological family living near us, so this was critical. If it were not for our relationships with others walking the same path, we would not have made it through. People cooked for us occasionally and several families were even brave enough to provide respite care for some, or all of our

kids for a weekend. If you are looking for a way to support foster families, this is a great way. There are not enough respite providers and foster families desperately need it. Please consider becoming a respite provider and supporting the families that are working so hard for these kids.

KIM: The support we have felt from Child Bridge and our church family (both Easthaven and other fellow Christians) has been overwhelming! There is NO way we could have done this without them. We have had people help us with meals and childcare, as well as financial, emotional, and spiritual support, the list goes on. Any family that seeks to foster or adopt would benefit from being connected to Child Bridge and a strong mission-minded church community. We have had people that were only acquaintances, or that we didn't even know, step forward to be some of our strongest supporters! Fostering and adopting was our calling. But there are those with a heart for hurting kids, just not the ability to take children into their homes. It has been wonderful to partner with like-minded people, each of us doing our part in helping these kids.

Anything else you would like to share?

This journey has been extremely rewarding, it has been difficult and sometimes seemingly impossible. BUT if you feel God has called you to foster or adopt, then He will walk with you through it all... If you let Him. The fruits from your labors are not always immediate, but when they do produce, you are reminded you are right where you're supposed to be. God has not called us to be comfortable, but to grow and walk the path that He will lead us down.

Our adoption was finalized December 23, 2015. Elizabeth Ann, Victoria Grace, and James Joseph legally became Browns... though they've been our family since the beginning.

For more information on Child Bridge visit www.childbridgemontana.org.