

The Berry Family

by the Berry's



Hello! We are the Berry family, comprised of David, Erin, Maxwell, and Charlotte. We adopted our daughter, Charlotte, with the help of the Wyoming Children's Society.

I (Erin) sat down to write this story and struggled to put into words how I feel about adoption. Obviously, I feel overwhelming joy at the honor of being Charlotte's mom. I also feel so much empathy, sadness, and admiration for Charlotte's birth family. While I don't feel it is my place to divulge much about Charlotte's birth mother and what she went through, part of adoption will always involve heartbreak and pain. Adoption, for us, involved so many contrary emotions. I am overjoyed at being Charlie's mom, while my heart breaks that her birth family doesn't get to experience her every day like we do. I wanted to start our adoption story by acknowledging those contrary emotions, and also ensuring I give all the credit for our joy and happiness to Charlie's birth family, their bravery and love, and acknowledging that our joy and happiness came at a cost.

I (David) so vividly remember the night in March 2020 when our son, Maxwell, was born. It was right at the beginning of the pandemic. Complications from Max's birth resulted in Erin severely hemorrhaging and having a hysterectomy to save her life. I distinctly remember a point where I was planning how I would raise my son as a single parent. Luckily, Erin pulled through, and we get to raise our family together.

Over the next few years, we spent time attempting to heal and come to terms with our inability to have another child. Eventually, our mindset shifted from, "Max will be an only child" to "why don't we look into adoption?" Our research led us to the Wyoming Children's Society, and with fear, excitement, and hope, we began the process of adoption, eager for the possibility of our family finally feeling whole. We finished our home study in April 2023, anticipating it would be a while before we had a match, and planning accordingly. As is often the case, life wasn't on board with our plans. Around a month after our home study was complete, on Mother's Day in 2023, Erin had this strange, yet certain feeling that she would get to be a mom again. Intuition, maybe, or maybe it was the beginnings of a connection to Charlie and her birth mother. A few weeks later, in June, Erin got a call from Kristi Roberts that changed our lives forever. Kristi told her that a birth mom wanted to meet us, and she was pregnant with a baby girl due in August.

“We felt instant love, and a connection unlike any other.”



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We drove to Casper the next week to meet Charlie's birth mother, and filled with more nerves than either of us had ever experienced. Once we met her, though, those nerves calmed. It felt right. It felt like, while we wouldn't wish the emotional hardship of an unplanned pregnancy on anyone, the stars aligned for our families to merge. We felt instant love, and a connection unlike any other.

In August, we got another call we will never forget from Christy LeClerc, telling us Charlie's birth mother was in labor. We drove to Casper and had the immense honor and joy of being able to witness our daughter's birth. The birth of our son was chaotic, hectic, and, our primary emotions were fear on the day of his birth. Charlie's birth could not have been more different. We got to watch her come into this world in her signature calm nature. We were the first ones to hold her, David cut the umbilical cord, and our family was finally complete.

Almost two years later, and we couldn't imagine a happier girl than Charlie. Her laugh comes so easy and frequently (sometimes at her brother's expense), and she's constantly zooming around the house screaming, "AHHHHHHH" like it will give her more speed. Our poor dogs, Ellie and Balto, live in a constant state of uncertainty because one minute, she'll be feeding them her entire dinner plate, and the next she will be shaking her finger, saying, "no Ellie! Mine!" for no clear reason. Her zest for life is unmatched, and we know that one day, she will take over the world, because the little girl won't let anything hold her back. She is a Daddy's girl and loves nothing more than to sit on a lap. Max is the best big brother, and she is the quintessential little sister —always there to wreck Max's towers and then give him a hug when she makes him mad. We are so happy that they will always have each other and that they both get to grow up with the love of a sibling.

We have so much gratitude for Kristi, Christy, and the entire Wyoming Children's Society staff for their support through the adoption process. They made us feel supported and constantly heard and calmed our fears and worries. Adoption is a process unlike any other, but through it, our family became whole.

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Join Us in Honoring Maureen Clifton at our Gala Celebrating 114 Years of Service

On Saturday, August 9, 2025 Wyoming Children's Society will celebrate 114 years serving women, children and families. Founded in 1911, the Society continues to advocate for all children in need of permanent, loving families through adoption while providing counseling and support to pregnant women in crisis.

Our annual Gala brings awareness to our mission and our work dedicated to improving the lives of those in need. As a child welfare agency with over a century of service in Wyoming, we feel it is important to recognize and honor those people whose work and advocacy has positively impacted adoption. Each year an individual or family is selected for their charitable work.

Maureen Clifton was named by the Wyoming Children's Society Board of Directors as this year's honoree. Maureen grew up in North Dakota, graduated with her Bachelor of Social Work degree from Minnesota State University and later earned her Master of Social Work degree from the University of Wyoming. She started her work with the State of Wyoming Department of Family Services in 1988. She has served in many capacities for the state including oversight of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (movement of children between states for placement), Wyoming Confidential Adoption Intermediary Commission (assisting people who wish to find their biological family relatives after adoption) and Medicaid coverage for children. Maureen has provided strong leadership in the areas of adoption and foster care in Wyoming.

For nearly 40 years, Maureen has devoted her professional career to improving the lives of children and families. She approaches each day with a positive outlook and hope. We have been fortunate to work with Maureen for many years as we assist with international and state-to-state adoptions. She has always been an advocate for the best needs of all children. We are grateful for her work and her partnership.

Maureen is the mother of three bright and beautiful adult children. Denzel Clifton graduated from the University of Wyoming with a degree in Business Administration. He currently works for the State of Wyoming Medicaid division. Dr. Richelle Clifton, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at the University of Washington School of Medicine. Dr. Maribeth Clifton, OTD, OTR/L is an Assistant Professor at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Please join us on August 9th as we celebrate Maureen Clifton and her nearly four decades of work serving others.



Board Spotlight

Family is deeply important to John and I. Our families shaped who we are, both as individuals and as a couple. Our family is the foundation for our morals, spirituality, and success. Both John's and my families are also quite large. John is the youngest of eight, and I am the youngest of five. Together, we have dozens of nieces and nephews. We knew we would have children when we married in 1994. However, we did not know God's path for us. Through years of fertility interventions, which included IVF and two failed surrogacies, we prayed often, relied on the love and support of our family, and never lost faith in God's plan.

Our two children have very different adoption stories. Our path to becoming a family is unique to us, but the desire to love, nurture, and build a family is shared by all parents - adoptive and otherwise. Welcoming adopted children into our lives has been the most incredible and fulfilling experience and I cannot imagine having built our family any other way. Today, our family has grown to include a wonderful son-in-law and two sweet granddaughters. Here's a little more about our story:

Paiton spent over two years in and out of foster homes before we became a forever family. Despite the trauma she experienced during her first three years, Paiton had several advocates who loved her and worked to facilitate the adoption and we are forever grateful for several loving foster parents and a handful of social workers who advocated for her and connected us. Just after she turned three, Paiton made us parents. Even though we did not work through Wyoming Children's Society to adopt Paiton, they have always welcomed her into the WCS family for as long as she can remember.

Within a year of adopting Paiton, we knew we wanted another. That's when we connected with the Wyoming Children's Society. From our first conversation with the team, we knew it was okay that we did not understand the process. I also knew we would stay connected long after the adoption was final because they do the most impactful work I can think of.



Left to Right: Kyle (son-in-law), Paiton, Lilly, Camille, Jillian, John, and Jack



Paiton and I after the very first WCS picnic we attended in 2008

We adopted Jack at birth and he just turned nineteen a few weeks ago. As we do each year, we recounted his birth. As adoptive parents, we felt the same emotions as every parent. We also felt profound gratitude for the WCS who carefully navigated the dynamics of our expectant family and the birth mother who was grieving, yet grateful.

We moved to Cheyenne when both of our children were still young. Coming from a small-ish Wyoming town, I was most excited for two things when we moved: Target and the Wyoming Children's Society. Our family and friendship circles are big, but I really wanted to connect with other adoptive families. That summer, the WCS hosted a family picnic where we met so many amazing parents and kids. John and I, as well as both of our kids, made forever friends at that picnic. The adoptive network in Cheyenne and across Wyoming is strong because of the organization, the families and birth parents they have served for over one hundred years, and dedicated donors.

My family has proudly prioritized the Wyoming Children's Society with our charitable giving for years. Now, serving on the board of directors allows me to translate my personal experiences and love for family on a larger, and more actionable scale.

Looking back on our journey, John and I are filled with immense gratitude. The challenges we faced made our family even stronger. We are a testament to the impact of adoption. Every child deserves a loving and supportive family. Wyoming Children's Society has made that a reality for my family and hundreds of others. It's an honor to be part of an organization that makes such a tangible difference.

Wyoming Children's Society Completes New 5-year Strategic Plan

Since arriving at the agency as CEO in September 2024, I have had countless conversations with staff members, board members, community partners and other stakeholders about the direction of our agency moving forward. We have been in existence for 114 years, as a private adoption agency, working with birth parents, adoptive families, and most importantly, children in Wyoming. Our mission very much is and will remain heavily rooted in adoption. As CEO, I am tasked with ensuring our current mission continues, but also making sure our agency remains relevant and vital in the future. Based on these discussions, in February 2025, we embarked on the process to construct a 5-year Strategic Plan.

All staff members and board members participated in this process, and I am amazed by the amount of work we completed. I am thankful for the passion and thoughtfulness displayed by our staff and board members. During the process, we identified 6 categories to concentrate on.

- Strong Financial Growth
- Adoption Program Growth
- Diversifying Services for the Community
- Marketing
- Statewide Outreach
- Staffing the Agency for Growth

Specific action steps within these broad categories have been developed, and work has begun on the short-term action steps.

Lastly, I need to thank our passionate and dedicated staff. Without them, our agency accomplishes nothing. I am committed to ensuring they have the resources, infrastructure and support they deserve in order to continue serving families and children at a high level.

Bryan M. Cook
CEO



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Once logged into your King Soopers or City Market account, click on Community Rewards and then search for Wyoming Children's Society either by name or our designated code: **JM705**. Then click Enroll. New users will need to create an account which requires some basic information, a valid email address and a *loyalty* card.

This is an easy way to give back to WCS while completing your normal grocery shopping. There is no extra charge to you!

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- 1 Log into your **King Soopers** Digital Account
- 2 Select Wyoming Children's Society (code **JM705**)
- 3 Support us every time you **shop**!

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WYOMING CHILDREN'S society

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To Use the Smith's Food & Drug Inspiring Donations Program:
First visit <http://www.smithsfoodanddrug.com/inspire>

Once logged into your Smith's Food & Drug account, search for Wyoming Children's Society either by name or our designated code: **IN589**. Then click Enroll. New users will need to create an account which requires some basic information, a valid email address and a rewards card.

This is an easy way to give back to WCS while completing your normal grocery shopping. There is no extra charge to you!

2025 WyoGives



We are excited to announce that Wyoming Children's Society will be participating in this year's WyoGives event on July 16, 2025. This event is a powerful, statewide 24-hour online fundraising event that is designed to bring the state together as one community to raise money and awareness for Wyoming's nonprofits. We appreciate all our donors, and we encourage donors that plan to donate this year to do it on July 16th! There are opportunities for us to receive matching funds, so we need you all to donate.

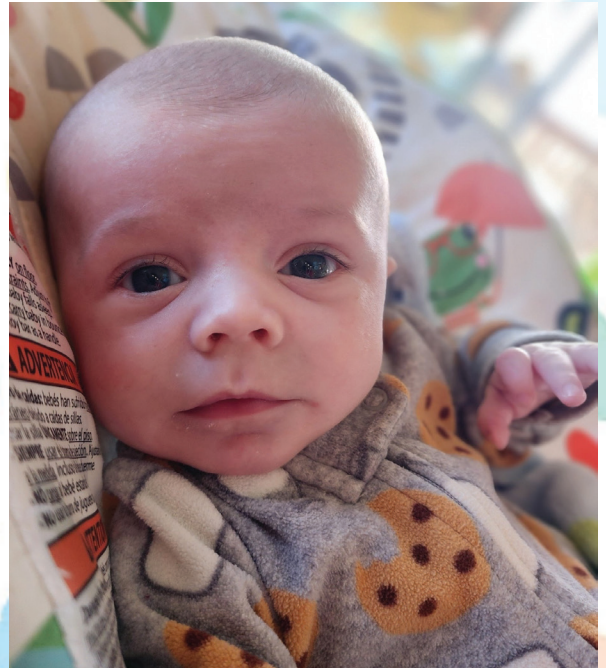
On July 16th, just go to:

<https://www.wyogives.org/organizations/wyoming-children-s-society>
and donate! It's that easy!

New Arrivals



Niah Shinabarger, Gillette



Teddy Anderson, Cheyenne

Education Corner

Positive Adoption Language

Language is important; it tells a story.
Words have power to shape perceptions and can either perpetuate negative stigmas
or foster a sense of acceptance and belonging.
We want to show respect for all parties involved.

Instead of...

Real / Natural Parent
Own Child
Adoptive Parent
Adopted Child
Is Adopted
Give Up / Adopt Out / Put Up
Keep the Child
Unwanted Pregnancy
Adoptable Child

Consider...

Birth Parent / Biological Parent
Child / Biological Child
Parent
Child
Was Adopted
Made an Adoption Plan / Placed for Adoption
Parent the Child
Unplanned Pregnancy
Waiting Child

Language is Education...

By using accurate language, we educate others about adoption.

It allows us to have real, meaningful conversations without inadvertently using judgmental or hurtful phrasing.

Of course, "accurate" language is subjective and always evolving, and you should choose words that are both accurate and feel right to you.

No one's perspective of their own adoption experience is wrong.

DONATION FORM

I, _____, would like to support Wyoming Children's Society
with this gift of \$_____.

Address _____ City _____ State ____ Zip _____

This gift is made in memory or honor (please circle one) of _____

Notification of this gift should be sent to _____ at the following address:

Address _____ City _____ State ____ Zip _____

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Thank you to our friends and supporters for your generous donations made to Wyoming Children's Society between October 15, 2024 and May 19, 2025.

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Clyde Holmes

Clyde Holmes

Clyde Holmes

Clyde Holmes

In Honor of

Dr. and Mrs. William J. Horam

Gina Olson

Emma, Mattie, Cody and Tucker Shields

A Big Thank You to Our 12 Star Giving Society Donors!!

Our 12 Star Giving Society donors are supporters of the agency who make monthly donations. If you are able please consider becoming a 12 Star Society Donor. These donations are so important to our agency as it is guaranteed monthly income and as a nonprofit this is so critical.

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Justin and Kara Fornstrom

Noah and Whitney Buckley

Paul Yaksic

Ron and Joyce Surdam

Shannon Murley in memory of Ellen McGee

Steve and Kathleen Cohoon

WYOMING CHILDREN'S *society*



Our Mission

Our mission is to build healthy families through adoption, and to advocate for birth families, children and adoptive families.

Our Vision

A world where every child belongs to a safe and loving family.

Staff and Board Listing

Staff

Bryan Cook, CEO

Kristi Roberts, Adoption Program Coordinator

Elizabeth Nkana, LCSW

Christy LeClercq, MSW, Social Worker - Casper

Carol Burman Lindly, Social Worker

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A large, abstract watercolor graphic in various shades of blue, resembling a cloud or a splash of paint, occupies the bottom half of the page. The colors range from light, airy blues to deeper, more saturated blues, with soft, feathered edges.

WYOMING
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society