

2021 Lake Agassiz Habitat for Humanity Partner Families

2021 Women Build Jamie and James' Family

Where are you living now? Type of home/location/etc.

I am currently living in small rental home in North Moorhead.

What are the most challenging parts of living there?

It's small, we have high bills and lots of plumbing problems.

Have you moved often to improve your living conditions?

Yes, we have, but it's very hard to find anything that is an improvement, fits our family, and is affordable.

How did you find out about Habitat for Humanity?

A co-worker told me about it and suggested I apply.

What caused you to apply?

I've been desperate for a stable home for my family and thought this was a great opportunity.

What was the first thing that went through your mind when you found out it was really going to happen?

I was over excited, and I didn't really know that to think.

How did your friends and family react?

They were very excited.

How did your kids react?

Over excited as us they have been talking about since our youngest has been talking about it for months (I was feeling the pressure, lol)

What part of the building excites you the most?

To put work into our home which will be rewarding and meaningful to us all.



Tell us about some of the struggles you have had?

Being homeless, worries of being homeless separated because of it. Paying bills and keeping food on the table because money was tight with bills. I saw no hope in getting ahead.

How do you feel your life goals might change after you move into your home?

I'll start to have hope for the future and begin saving for retirement, more time for my education instead of overtime hours at work to make ends meet.

You will have to work hard for this. What do you think of the sweat equity concept?

We think it's awesome and a great learning experience. We are excited to invest in ourselves and our life change.

Is there anything else you would like to add about this next stage in your life? Anything you would like to say to our donors and volunteers?

Thank You for giving us this life changing opportunity! It means the world to us and appreciate every one of you! I'm still in shock!

2021 30th Anniversary Build

The Brooks Family

Where are you living now? Type of home/location/etc.

I am currently living in a modest two-bedroom, one bathroom, apartment with my one-year-old and four-year-old daughters in South Fargo.

What are the most challenging parts of living there?

The street in front of our apartment building is one of the busiest main corridor streets in Fargo. I remain concerned about the continual risk of my oldest daughter running out into this heavy traffic. There is no yard, unfinished landscaping with primarily mud and dirt or weeds surrounding the apartment and the onsite playground was demolished and removed. We are sharing a crowded two-bedroom apartment. There is not a lot of room to spare; we are rapidly outgrowing our small space. My daughters share a smaller second bedroom that is stressful at times. It can be sometimes challenging for them both to get a full good night's sleep due to my infant daughter waking up often during the night and as a result waking up her older sister.

Unfortunately, our living conditions are hazardous, unsafe and not reliable. In the winter it was cold and drafty; the heat went out numerous times causing temps to drop into the 50's inside our apartment. While having a newborn during these times, I worried constantly that she would become ill due to conditions inside our unreliable residence. Our apartment leaks water from the bedroom ceiling causing the walls and carpets to become saturated with water and mold to develop behind the walls. I made countless attempts requesting maintenance to come address the mold and repair the ceiling and wall, but they were largely ignored. Now the ceiling and wall are cracking and peeling.

I worry about our unsafe living conditions due to the rising crime rate surrounding us.

Rent increases occur rapidly and frequently as the apartment management changed hands and the cost-of-living burden is taking a toll on my finances.

Have you moved often to improve your living conditions?

After moving 11 times in my life, I want to finally have long-term stability for my family to grow and thrive. Every move I made was expensive and exhausting.



How did you find out about Habitat for Humanity?

I first heard of Habitat for Humanity on a Mission Trip I made to Jamaica when I was still in High School. We dedicated a day during the mission trip to spend working on a construction site for a Habitat for Humanity home. We worked with local volunteers and the community to help build a home for a local family. I fondly remember the Habitat for Humanity partner family cooking and sharing a customary and traditional meal with us. I remember the meal being prepared and made right there on the property and cooked over an open fire.

Recently, I needed a washer and dryer and a friend of mine suggested going to ReStore. I tell you what, when I arrived there, the volunteers and staff were so helpful and assisted in helping me pick out a gently used washer and dryer. I was so shocked at the reasonable cost for a quality washer and dryer. My stop at ReStore reminded me of Habitat for Humanity's work to build houses in partnership with a family.

What caused you to apply.

I pride myself in fostering a solid foundation for a stronger future for my daughters, All I do, and in every decision, I make, I do and make for my girl's benefit. It is important for me to be a role model for them. As an independent, single mother, I know I must provide for my girls and keep them safe, which sometimes comes with large sacrifices. I have wanted to buy a home for a very long time.

Then COVID-19 happened, and it required all of us to stay at home all day, every day. The apartment walls felt like they were collapsing in on us. I was so sick and tired of the continued cycle of endlessly renting that I was stuck in. I knew the importance of each of my daughters having their own space to play or simply be alone. They are rapidly outgrowing their shared bedroom. Because of all the problems with our apartment and the need for an extra room and added space, I knew I had to find someplace bigger with three bedrooms. I was more than ready to become a homeowner but struggled with finding an affordable option.

I remember the exact moment when I took the first step in applying for the Homeownership Program and to find out if my family would qualify. It was a bright, sunny day during the middle of the pandemic, and we needed to escape the confines of our apartment. The childcare centers had closed, most businesses were shut down, and many activities taking place in our community were cancelled. I remember taking my two daughters to a park and there I made that first call to Habitat for Humanity. I recall Brianna answering my call and she encouraged me to apply and mailed me the application.

What was the first thing that went through your mind when you found out it was really going to happen.

It happened through a Zoom meeting with quite several people present. I was very nervous and unsure of what to expect. Then the words I had waited 7 months to hear were actually said: 'Congratulations, you've been chosen as one of our partner families.' My jaw dropped because I could not believe this was actually happening! I could not stop crying and smiling at the same time. I remember thinking to myself, that it has been so long since I have cried tears of happiness. I was so ecstatic and remember squeaking out a 'thank you' numerous times throughout the call. I could not believe that it was actually true, and MY FAMILY IS GOING TO HAVE A HOME, a place to feel safe and secure for the rest of our lives.

How did your friends and family react?

My family was elated. My Mom started crying as she was so happy that my dreams and hard work were coming true for me and my girls. I remember immediately asking my Dad to start making a 'homeowners check list' and he promised that he would start on it. My parents have always instilled in me that in having faith, things will work out. They said that their prayers and my prayers were heard and answered.

I now can slightly understand how my parents must have sacrificed so many things in order to create a comfortable childhood home for me, but I never felt the weight of any of their struggles to do so. My goal is that my kids experience that comfortable childhood too, that they only see that hard work pays off and, with the right support, all is possible.

How did your kids react?

I told my oldest daughter that we would be moving to a house with a backyard and they would each have their own room and space. My four-year-old daughter asked if she could paint her room 'rainbow colors' with 'unicorns' because that is 'her favorite color and unicorns just go with rainbows.' She also asked if I would build her a 'tree house' right away in the backyard. She said she was sooo excited that we would have a grassy backyard of our own so she can set up a pool in the summer and that she will be able to open the door and go right outside to blow bubbles into the sky. My infant daughter is simply along for the ride, but I am absolutely positive she will appreciate having a room to herself and away from her rambunctious older sister.

What part of the building excites you the most?

Knowing that I will be participating in the build. A solid and strong foundation is necessary for me to build a future on. I will be able to help construct my home's 'foundation' and to me that represents me forming a better future for us through sweat and tears (happy tears). To think that once completed, we will live in a home that I helped build alongside the many volunteers, neighbors, and sponsors, who I know will become a permanent part of our story, is priceless. The connections formed with others during this build are unique and irreplaceable.

What makes you the most nervous about this partnership?

Right now, I am nervous about what the next steps are going to be and what level I will be involved during the process.

Tell us about some of the struggles you have had?

I worked extremely hard for many years as a Registered Nurse. Throughout all those years working, I cared for numerous patients, in a variety of settings, and I love my honorable profession.

I was critically injured in an auto accident which resulted in severe and significant impacts on my financial situation due to the high costs of medical treatment and the time and income lost because of required absences from work. The auto accident injuries took a toll on my mental and physical wellbeing caused by pain and suffering, and the necessary time devoted to rehabilitation. It resulted in complicated hardships affecting my finances, my ability to work as a Registered Nurse and my overall quality of life. The setbacks, cost and damages from this accident and additional circumstances outside of my control still affect me today. I know that in order to succeed and overcome the complications from the accident, I require a sense of self-efficacy. So, I relentlessly fight forward with resilience to surpass the inevitable barriers from the injuries and inequities of the overall circumstances. Resilience is a precious skill that I hold.

It was not until I was ready to finally leave a traumatic, abusive relationship, and take with me my eldest daughter, that I discovered exactly how resilient I am as a mother. I escaped the cycle of violence and eventually, I stopped seeing myself as a victim and began seeing myself as a survivor. I started to rebuild our lives together. I recently was blessed with the birth of my infant daughter and proudly support both of my children as a single mother. To keep my burdens at bay, I modified my work hours so I could stay at home and devote my time to raising my daughters. I cherish every minute of that time spent with my girls, regardless of the sacrifices I must make. But I was still moving from one apartment to another while working when feasible and taking care of my daughters.

How do you think this will change the lives for you and your kids? Best guess!

Independence! This build will give us the opportunity to create “our home”. Something we can finally call ours and become self-sufficient in. The girls and I will take pride living in our new home and the security we will feel there. As my daughters grow up and reach those “fun” teenage years, I have a feeling that the extra space and everyone having their own rooms will be essential. I cannot wait to have a kitchen that I am actually able to enjoy and have the space to prepare and cook meals in. Family meals together are very important to me.

How do you think your life goals might change after you move into your new home?

Homeownership is one goal that many people hope for. My friends and family stood by me for many years throughout my times of struggle and rallied for my success. It is now time to pay it forward. My future goals will include supporting and investing time in my community. I want to practice credibility and accountability by considering and investing in others’ needs. I want my children to see this in me and carry the same tradition forward. Everyone needs help and attention at times, and I hope to act when the opportunity presents itself. Life is all about us living together and sharing the moment.

For us, we did not think that owning a home could be a possibility at this time due to many factors. After we move in, the sky will be the limit for our future goals. I know I will encourage my daughters to always have faith and to set goals and aim to achieve them. If you set your mind to it, you can make it happen.

You will have to work hard for this. What do you think of the sweat equity concept?

I believe that given this opportunity to pour my unpaid labor of love into the actual process of building our home represents my commitment and establishes that I am a stakeholder in this build. I appreciate the fact in which I know that I am not just handed a house — I am still responsible for the same things anyone else is such as a mortgage and homeownership obligations, Habitat for Humanity is just putting it within my reach. Sweat equity spent towards homeownership increases the value that results from my hard work. It allows me to contribute to the strong foundation for my family’s future. It challenges me to make meaningful contributions actively and continually to our community, support myself and others in their journeys, and build a better future.

Is there anything else you would like to add about this next stage in your life? Anything else you would like to say to our donors and volunteers?

Words alone cannot express the gratitude and thanks I have for the donors, staff and volunteers going into this build. My dream is not about me anymore, it is all for my children and you are helping to make their dreams a reality. I genuinely believe that all the donors and the volunteers will become the community of people who have the greatest positive impact on us. The contributions, time and effort that they generously donate are directly helping to create a life for us to grow as a family in a safe and healthy environment. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart for this opportunity to turn the page to an incredibly positive chapter in my girls and my life. Having a place to call home is a feeling like no other, it creates a sense of comfort that is indescribable.

2021 CEO Build

The Benjamin Family



Where are you living now? Type of home/location/etc.

I am currently renting a 4-bedroom 2-bathroom house in South Moorhead.

What are the most challenging parts of living there?

We are feeling a little overcrowded. I have two teenage girls that are very opposite of one another, so it causes clashes between them. The rental amount is significantly high which makes it hard to save money. We have outdated windows that are drafty and our electrical is not very good. We also have a mouse problem.

Have you moved often to improve your living conditions?

Yes, I have moved to get away from high crimes areas. Then I learned that two of nieces were separated and living in the foster care system, so I moved to find a bigger house to get them here with family.

How did you find out about Habitat for Humanity?

My late best friend of 12 years and her family were blessed with a home from Habitat for Humanity when she was young. The subject came up and I thought I would give it a try.

What caused you to apply?

My dream of being a homeowner just seemed to constantly be pushed further and further into the future. I do whatever I can to help the ones I love but that does come with sacrifices. I had to push back working towards a home to help bring my nieces in with me, finding new work, and then starting school. I was not able to find the time to proceed with finding a forever home myself, let alone the additional funds that come with that.

What was the first thing that went through your mind when you found out it was really going to happen?

Finally! The last goal on my current list is going to be achieved. My kids, all of them are going to finally have a permanent home to call ours!

How did your friends and family react?

I have only told a select few but they all screamed for excitement as I did. Many say I am deserving but I feel I just got lucky!

How did your kids react?

My older kids are nervous. The home they have been in now has been the home they have been in the longest in their entire life due to foster care. So, moving scares them. My younger kids are ecstatic!

What part of the building excites you the most?

The details. The ability to be a part of something that is going to change my life. The gratitude. The learning and the connections.

What makes you the most nervous about this partnership?

Nothing really, just excited to get building.

Tell us about some of the struggles you have had?

I am a recovery addict. I have been through almost anything you could think of. My childhood was full of adversity and addiction has had its grip on me since I was a young child. I have suffered abuse throughout my years and the trauma of losing my best friend was the hardest of them all. I am so lucky that I was able to see clearly for just long enough to seek the help that I needed to better my life. Since I have been in recovery, I have been able to build myself back up into a healthy Mother for my children and community.

How do you think this will change the lives of you and your kids? Best guess!

It will bring stability in our lives and it will teach my children to work for the things you need in life and if you need help, ask for it.

How do you feel your life goals might change after you move into your home?

I've had the goal of going back to school for some time. I feel like having a stable and affordable home will give me more time to focus on making that goal a reality.

You will have to work hard for this. What do you think of the sweat equity concept?

I think it is perfect. I asked for help and it is only right that I get my hands dirty with everyone else because this is what I wanted.

Is there anything else you would like to add about this next stage in your life? Anything you would like to say to our donors and volunteers?

I am just beyond appreciative for this opportunity and how life changing this is going to be. Not only for me but my children. I am breaking the cycle that I was raised in and I am happy to share that with my children. This will be so healthy for my nieces to be a part of. They will always have a home to come back to, even as adults.

So, for that, gratitude does not even begin to touch on how eternally grateful I am.

2021 Faith Build

The Castillo Family



Where are you living now? Type of home/location/etc.

I am currently living in North Moorhead in mobile home.

What are the most challenging parts of living there?

Space for my daughter that is in a wheelchair.

Have you moved often to improve your living conditions?

We have not been able to find anything that was better and that we could afford.

How did you find out about Habitat for Humanity?

I found out about Habitat for Humanity from a friend who had previously applied for a house. She told me I should also apply for a house, because she thought we would be a great fit for the program.

What caused you to apply?

We really need a bigger house. The kids need more space, and we need more space for medical supplies.

What was the first thing that went through your mind when you found out it was really going to happen?

My first thought was God answered my prayers then I started crying, because this is something I've wanted for a long time now!

How did your friends and family react?

They were happy for me and my kids and they cannot wait to help us build the house.

How did your kids react?

The kids were so happy that they are going to have their own rooms. My daughter Nevaeh's first question was if the hallways will be bigger.

What part of the building excites you the most?

I'm most excited about watching it be built and being a part of the process with my friends and family.

What makes you the most nervous about this partnership?

New change in our lives.

Tell us about some of the struggles you have had?

I have had many struggles. I could start by saying I have had my pipes frozen almost every year, which leaves my family with no water for days. I have had my heat go out due to an old furnace. I also had my water heater bust, which caused a pipe to bust and then all the floors became wet and caused mold. Due to one of my children being disabled and, in a wheelchair, we do not have enough space for her equipment, and she cannot move around freely.

How do you think this will change the lives of you and your kids? Best guess!

I think the biggest change would be us having space my kids would no longer need to share rooms, space for medical equipment, and a better and safer environment for my family.

How do you feel your life goals might change after you move into your home?

I will think positively all the time, no matter what happens.

You will have to work hard for this. What do you think of the sweat equity concept?

I am ready for it!

Is there anything else you would like to add about this next stage in your life? Anything you would like to say to our donors and volunteers?

Thank you so much from the bottom of my heart! This is not just changing my life, but my kid's lives forever.