

# The Leader-Herald

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## Local couple finalize adoption of three sons

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Tammi and Stephen Beck stand in front of their Gloversville home on Wednesday, one day after they finalized the adoption of their three sons. The siblings, aged eight, six and four, were placed with the Becks as foster children by Northern Rivers Family of Services in 2015. (The Leader-Herald/Ashley Onyon)

GLOVERSVILLE — Families can be formed in many ways. Regardless of their origins, the connection between parents and their children is instantly recognizable.

People who observe Tammi and Stephen Beck with their three sons see an ordinary family, because that is what they are, the Becks say, although they were first brought together through foster care.

*“We’ve been living this life for the last three years,”* Tammi Beck said Wednesday, one day after she and her husband finalized the adoption of their sons. *“It doesn’t feel any different day to day, it’s just a little piece of paper that makes it official.”*

The Becks agreed that the previous day was *“amazing,”* giving them the peace of mind that their children will always be with them, but the boys already were their children and had been since they were matched to provide foster care by the Northern Rivers Family of Services in 2015.

*“It’s amazing how quickly you can fall in love with children that are not your own,”* Tammi Beck said. *“They take to you as much as you do to them.”*

The Becks decided to explore foster care as a method to start a family in February 2015 after seeing a flier for Northern Rivers. The couple filled out a form online and then met with a recruiter.

The pair said they didn't know much about foster care at the time and weren't certain that it was the right option for them, but the 30 hour course that prospective foster parents take to get certified was the perfect way to learn more and helped them make up their minds.

During the course, prospective foster parents went through an exercise discussing some of the gains and losses they've experienced in their lives before discussing the gains and losses of some of the children placed in foster care. The Becks were convinced they could help children in need and shortly after completing the course in May 2015 a caseworker matched them with their future sons.

The Becks knew they wanted to foster children that were available for adoption. Tammi Beck said they wanted to start slow initially with one child below school age so they could establish a routine, but the caseworker suggested placing a sibling set of three boys who were four, two and five-months-old at the time with the couple.

*"When they told us three, it was a lot to think about,"* Tammi Beck said.

They decided to give the placement a chance, meeting with the kids individually first, then having all three kids spend the night at their house.

*"The first time was not easy,"* she said. *"They had been to many houses and had a lot of anxiety. There was no sleep."*

The discomfort was gone after 24 hours and the kids became more comfortable with the couple. Initially, the kids would stay with the Becks for weekend visits and it was hard for the boys and the couple when they had to go back to the foster parents they were staying with during the week.

*"You need to be a strong person with a kind heart to be a foster parent,"* Stephen Beck said.

The Becks put in a request with Northern Rivers to have the boys join them on week-long vacation in Maine and it was during this trip that they became a family.

The boys were nervous at first, saying that going on “*vacation*” meant being dropped off with another new family. The couple explained that the five of them would be together the whole time, having fun in a new place and the boys quickly came around once the trip got underway despite a few bouts of car sickness.

*“We were out of state where there was no support, it was just us and the kids. They bonded to us,”* Tammi Beck said.

Things progressed from there with the boys coming to live with the Becks full time. While they love the children and the life they’ve built, the couple acknowledged that it hasn’t always been easy.

According to Colleen Vogel, director of recruitment and retention foster care at Northern Rivers, children can be placed in foster care by court order due to abuse, neglect or risk of harm or sometimes parents can voluntarily place children in foster care when the family is experiencing serious medical, emotional or financial problems.

The Becks said their children had gone through some difficult things in their young lives and sometimes a forgotten memory can be triggered by an event, sight, sound or smell.

*“You just have to reassure them, make them as comfortable as possible and get them through it,”* Tammi Beck said. *“I don’t think you can ever truly be trained to be a foster parent.”*

The Becks said Northern Rivers has given them a great deal of support over the past three years helping to coordinate appointments, providing services for the children and answering questions. The agency also helped

coordinate visits between the children and their birth mother who is still part of their lives.

The Becks said their relationship with the boys' birth mother was rocky at first, but eventually they came to a mutual understanding that they all wanted what was best for the children.

*"We worked at it and met outside of the agency. It took time, but we came to an agreement that we weren't there for us or for her, we were there for the kids. We made the kids the number one priority,"* Tammi Beck said. *"There are still things we don't always agree on, but as long as the kids are safe and happy it should be OK."*

The path to adoption and the certainty that the kids would always be with them was another challenge.

Vogel said it is not uncommon for foster parents to adopt their children, but family court must change the child's status from reunification with the birth family to freed for adoption.

*"We explain to all of our foster parents that our agency's mission includes preserving families by working in conjunction with the birth families to make every effort to reunite children and their families,"* Vogel said.

Although the boys' status had already been determined before their placement, the legal process to formalize the adoption took a few years and there were times the Becks worried about the impermanence of foster care placements.

*"I can't speak for having a foster kid go home, but I'm sure it's hard,"* Tammi Beck said. *"It's a hard pill to swallow to love them and have to do what is best for them. It's not in your control, you're just going along for the ride."*

Now that the adoption has been finalized the Becks are overjoyed and the kids, now eight, six and four, are ecstatic.

*“I don’t know how much they fully understand it, they just know they’re not going any place,”* Tammi Beck said. *“It’s a relief. There’s no more worry for anybody.”*

The couple said they plan to stay open to additional foster care placements for children who are available for adoptions and those in need of temporary placement.

*“It is very rewarding to see the happiness of a kid that’s gone through what they’ve gone through, that they’re able to come home from school with a smile on their face,”* Stephen Beck said.

*“It’s been a great experience,”* his wife added. *“There’s lots of kids that need help.”*

Vogel said it’s difficult to measure how many children are in need of foster care placement at the moment, because there is no way to anticipate when a family will experience a crisis that will result in the removal of their children.

Northern Rivers currently oversees 23 foster homes in Fulton and Montgomery counties and many of the placements made by the agency are of sibling groups of two or more children.

*“We are always in need of foster homes/parents who are motivated to help children and families reunite as a family. The more pool of foster parents we have, we can make the best matches for children to be successful in a foster home,”* Vogel said.

The Becks agreed that providing foster care worked for them, suggesting that more people explore the option and take a certification class to learn more before making up their mind.

*“I highly suggest people always keep foster care as an option if they’re looking to help somebody, build a family or wanting to make a difference, foster care is definitely a good option,” Tammi Beck said. “It’s got to be in your heart.”*