This is Why They Do It

Every year, the community’s efforts combine to create foster care success stories on National Adoption Day, and this Sanford family is thrilled to give their new 13-year-old daughter a forever home.

For all of her life, 13-year-old Jasmine has never had her own bedroom, never attended the same school for more than a year, and has been living away from all of her siblings.

But on November 20, 2015, that all changed. Jasmine’s uncle and aunt, Matthew and Jessica Brice, officially adopted her. Jasmine was reunited with her half-sister, Piper, who is now six and was adopted by the family two years ago.

“These have been the longest years of my life,” Jessica says, “just waiting to officially call her ours.”

Jessica and Matthew brought Jasmine to court on National Adoption Day where foster care officials rolled out the red carpet for the seven Seminole County children who would be going home with their forever families.

“You could just feel the excitement in the courtroom that day,” Jessica says. “It was a dream come true for all of us.”

The Brice family hopes to give Jasmine the normalcy and stability she’s always craved. She’ll be attending Seminole High School next year and wants to be a nurse. Jasmine takes piano lessons and loves soccer.

“It was a tough family situation, but we knew we could give Jasmine the life she deserves,” Jessica says through tears. “The road to adoption is heartwrenching, but that day we signed the paperwork was the greatest day of our lives. We’ve just been praying for so long, and now it’s done.”

Jasmine is now officially a Brice; the official last-name change was something she’d always wanted. The family surprised her with her very own bedroom decorated in hand paintings of classic Mickey Mouse.

“She’s never had a bedroom, a place to call her own,” Jessica says. “Every kid should have a place they can feel safe.”

The Brice family: Jessica, Matthew, Piper, and new 13-year-old Jasmine with Circuit Judge Susan Stacy

Martha Sugalski

We’re used to seeing television anchor and Longwood resident Martha Sugalski giving us the news from the WFTV anchor desk. It’s a job that she knows comes with great responsibility.

“I feel lucky to have a voice in this community, so I want to use it to share the stories of these foster kids whose voices may otherwise not be heard,” Martha explains.

As a mother of six kids, including two-year-old triplets, Martha says foster children have always held a special place in her heart, especially those youngsters between the ages of 5 and 18, who are generally among the most difficult to place. She feels honored to tell the stories of children looking for an adoptive family in a popular WFTV series called Forever Family. The stories are broadcast every Thursday at 4:00 p.m. on WFTV Channel 9. Martha says it’s been her most cherished work as a journalist.

“I hope our stories keep raising that kind of awareness. These kids deserve it.”

— Martha Sugalski

“We spend an afternoon with the kids, and we never talk about anything negative,” says Martha. “We don’t ask them about their past. We focus on who they are, what makes them special. One of my favorite questions to ask is how their friends would describe them. We really get to know them.”

Martha gets choked up talking about one interview she’ll never forget: a young man on his 16th birthday, and all he wanted was a mom or a dad.

“This kid didn’t get balloons or a cake, there wasn’t even any mention of it... There he sat, just wanting a family to call his own,” Martha recalls, “I go home and hug my own kids so tight after these interviews.”

But it is these interviews on Forever Family that have helped tremendously, not only in placing children with mentors, but in getting the word out to those who want to help.

“I think there’s a great misconception about who these kids are,” Martha says. “We had some of the foster children over to our house to do the interviews, and one looked at my family pictures on the wall and said, ‘Is that your son Maxwell?’ We got to talking, and this child was at Lake Mary High School with my son. I would have never known. I hope our stories keep raising that kind of awareness. These kids deserve it.”