



in—all of us have to work together to meet this tremendous need in our community.”

Those efforts, despite the challenges, have allowed some low-income families with deep roots in Paradise to be able to come home.

Like the Wolfes, Dayna Collett and her 10-year-old son, Tristan White, found it challenging to find a place to land after the fire—any lead they found was “taken up so fast,” she said. Collett, who was born and raised in Paradise, was living with family at the time of the fire and was not insured.

White has suffered from night terrors and separation anxiety—he had to flee the fire with a family member while Collett was working in Chico, she said. He was on his way to school with cupcakes to celebrate his birthday.

On a recent afternoon while visiting their new property in Paradise, White played fetch with their new puppy, Walter. His dog is a survivor, too, a rescue from 2020’s North Complex Fire. Having Walter as a companion has been therapeutic for her son, Collett shared. The pandemic has exacerbated the trauma he has experienced being disconnected from his community—as his classmates went back to school, he had to continue learning from home. He is an insulin-dependent diabetic, which puts him at greater risk of infection.

Her son has been so excited about coming back to Paradise, Collett shared. White has talked about returning to school, going fishing at the Aquatic Pond and playing at Bille Park. He’s thrilled that his friend Riley, Wolfe’s son, will be one of his new neighbors.

Like Wolfe, when Collett speaks about her future, it brings tears of joy to her eyes.

Dayna Collett; her son, Tristan White; and their puppy, Walter, visit the site of their future home in Paradise. Collett said being selected for Habitat for Humanity of Butte County’s affordable housing program “just changed my life forever.”

PHOTO BY ASHIAH SCHARAGA

The day she found out she’d been selected for the program is one that she’ll never forget, she said. She heard a knock at the door of her apartment in Chico and opened it to find the Habitat for Humanity team standing there with a sign informing her that she would be a new homeowner.

Her son joined her to see what was going on, and they cried together.

“It was literally like winning the lottery. Like, *Oh my god, that just changed my life forever*,” she said.

White and she have a Pinterest board that contains images representing their goals and dreams for their new home. Collett said she’s looking forward to enjoying fresh fruits and veggies from her own garden again. Her son is excited about having barbecues and bouncing on a trampoline in the backyard.

“We’re just a family trying to start over. We’re just so grateful for this opportunity and just excited to see where life goes from here.”

Wolfe and Collett both told the CN&R how deeply connected they feel to Paradise. Though the devastation can be hard to bear at times, they haven’t lost hope for the future of the town. They want to be part of its rebirth.

“I hope we can be that beacon of hope,” Wolfe said, “to help guide other people home.” □

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