

**Rebuild: Up from the Ashes**  
**Stories of Hope: The Gray family**  
*By Rick and Katie Larson*

The Beatles got by with a little help from their friends. The Gray family has gotten back on their feet with help from a lot of friends — and the Okanogan Long-Term Recovery Group.

The nonprofit agency, which was formed after the disastrous fires of 2014 and 2015, coordinates aid from a network of charitable and faith-based groups that are still working to get people back into homes after the fires. In the Grays' case, the agency supplemented the family's own efforts to rebuild.

Brian and Michelle Gray and their six children lost their home near Alta Lake in the 2014 Carlton Complex fire. As they searched for a new home, they were forced to split up their children to live in other homes.

Determined to bounce back and reunite the family, the Grays invested their savings in a rural property north of Brewster. But they couldn't get a bank loan to build, so Brian, who had started a general contracting business, resolved to rebuild as money became available.

First, he and friends built a 12'x20' bunkhouse on their new property and moved a fifth-wheel trailer nearby. The cramped quarters housed the family as they restarted their lives.

Brian said they ran out of money after getting their new home's foundation in and the walls framed. Friends and church groups helped them by purchasing permits, building and installing rough plumbing.

But the home needed a roof to protect the structure, and that's when OLTRG Executive Director Carlene Anders convinced the independent family to accept help. OLTRG provided money for materials, which the family and friends installed themselves.

As the four-bedroom home took shape, the agency provided more help so the Grays could continue building — providing money for siding, wiring, insulation, sheetrock, paint, fixtures, cabinets and porches.

"We feel very blessed," said Michelle. "We went from a rental, not owning anything, to having a home."

Disaster Case Manager Renae Haug said OLTRG provided \$14,000 to help the Grays build. They were impressed because the Grays had done so much on their own.

"When we first started, I thought everything would be done by Christmas (2015), but then we couldn't get a loan," Brian said. Disaster officials said difficulty in getting building loans and insurance in the remote country have left many other families still trying to rebuild.

But as the temperature hovered around zero on a windy day in early January, the couple sat in their living room warmed by a wood stove and said their family is back together thanks to many donations of labor, fixtures and furniture. A sign on the wall reminds: "Count Your Blessings."

And at the foot of their driveway, a large sign proudly tells visitors they are entering "The Gray Zone."