



There's no such thing as a typical adopter. The single people, and the married and unmarried couples from all ages, backgrounds and circumstances who decide to provide a permanent home for children who can no longer live with their birth families, do so for many different reasons.

Adoption is certainly a popular route for couples with fertility problems to create the family they yearn for. Others look to adoption to extend their family or to start a 'second' family once their own children get older and leave home.

There are others for whom adoption is a preference to having their own children naturally. Michael Jones and Louise Philips are one such couple.

Professionals in their mid-thirties, Michael and Louise have been together for 15 years. They live comfortably in the North Sefton suburbs. Michael works in sales and Louise is an airline cabin manager.

"We both knew that we wanted children," said Louise. "We did discuss the issue from time to time and we knew that one day, we would have a family but the fact is that neither of us ever craved for a baby, and we were never in a rush.

"There's certainly no medical reason why we couldn't have children of our own – it's just that the natural route didn't appeal to us as much as it does to other people. We're all different, after all."

The catalyst behind the couple's adoption journey was an article in Cheshire Life in December 2000 on behalf of the area's leading adoption agency, Adoption Matters.

Through Cheshire Life, the agency was appealing for would-be adopters to provide a permanent home for four year-old Kriss. The feature generated scores of enquiries and resulted in Kriss being adopted less than a year later.

Louise continued: "I read and re-read the story a dozen times and the magazine was always around our home. I was fascinated and it really got both us thinking about adoption.

The couple didn't act on the article immediately but continued to discuss the idea of adoption with family and close friends. After several more months of consideration, the couple contacted Adoption Matters.

"We had an initial, informative interview with Adoption Matters and although it was helpful, we were determined not to rush into a decision. But after further contact with the agency, we decided we did want to take it further."

A round of workshops, thorough assessments and preparation followed, with the question of why the couple wanted to adopt often cropping up.

Michael takes up the story: "We agreed we'd like to adopt two boys aged between three and seven but decided from the outset if one of us had any doubts, we would stop. We needed to be 100 per cent sure. We never wavered."

The couple were eventually approved to adopt two children but with more boys than girls waiting for a new home, the couple faced a difficult challenge.

Michael explains: We were aware that boys, especially between the ages of four and ten, were harder to place than girls and it was tough for us to decide. We had all these children to choose from and details about each one of them."

Louise adds: "It was so hard looking at all the profiles. We were warned the first time we looked at the children we'd choose quite a few and you just end up falling in love with all of them. It was so difficult but eventually we realised we needed to be practical."

After three months of searching, the couple finally found the perfect fit in brothers Thomas, then six, and Andrew, then five.

"Our social worker told us about two brothers who were looking for a new family. As soon as we saw the photos of them, we knew they were for us. We'd always been told we'd know when we saw 'our' children. It was instinctive," explained Michael.

A nail-biting few weeks followed when they discovered another couple were also interested in the brothers.

"It was a tough time. We had our heart set on the boys but had to face the possibility they may not come to us," explains Louise.

The nervous couple received a home visit - prompting Louise to worry that the small size of their garden would work against them.

But to their delight, Louise and Michael were chosen: "It felt wonderful but I also felt awful for the other couple. We knew exactly what they had gone through," said Louise.

During the next month, the new parents made the most of their time as a couple enjoying several nights out. They also prepared the house for the boys' arrival, with regular trips to toyshops and DIY stores.

Eventually, adoption day arrived and they set off to meet the children for the first time.

"We didn't know what to expect. We knew the boys had been told they were getting a new mummy and daddy but it's always in the back of your mind – what if I don't like them? What if they don't like us? We needn't have worried."

Sitting in the boys' foster home, Louise and Michael waited for Thomas and Andrew to return from school.

“We saw them walk up the path. They didn’t hesitate even though they knew they were about to meet their new parents. The first thing that struck us was how tiny they were!”

The meeting passed in a blur for the couple, but Louise recalls one moment that will always be with her.

“It was when Andrew pointed at me and said ‘you’re my new mummy’. It took my breath away and I realised how much our lives would change.”

Louise and Michael spent 10 days with the children, enjoying days out and bonding as a family before finally taking them home.

“It was nerve-racking taking them home but it always felt right. We’ve had tantrums as you’d expect, especially considering the boys’ background but we have been lucky,” said Louise.

And the couple are well aware of how much their life has changed.

“For the first two months we whispered when they were asleep terrified we’d wake them up! But we soon got used to it and wouldn’t be without them”

Michael adds: “There’s an idea that to adopt you need to be perfect, almost super human. I think that might put some people off.

“No one’s perfect and that not what adoption agencies like Adoption Matters are looking for – adopters are ordinary people living ordinary lives and facing the same challenges as the rest of us.

Children waiting for adoption don’t need saints - they need parents,” he added.