



## Debbie

The current estimate of children who for various reasons are no longer able to live with their birth parents is 4,000.

The area's leading voluntary adoption agency, Adoption Matters Northwest, reports that its adoption specialists are receiving as many as 70 requests each week from social services departments throughout the UK anxious to find new homes for children in the care.

"We can't keep up with demand," said Chief Executive Norman Goodwin. "We urgently need more individuals and couples of all ages and from all backgrounds to consider their potential for becoming adoptive parents."

He continued: "It's a tragic fact that large numbers of the children who are waiting never receive a single enquiry. Can you imagine how that must make them feel?"

An increasing number of adopters from the area are adopting children with a disability - they make up a significant proportion of the children who are often overlooked.

However, according to one local adopter, giving a home, love and security to children with disabilities is one of the most rewarding and satisfying things you can do...

Raising two children might satisfy the maternal instincts of many mothers. It certainly wasn't enough for Debbie Mason!

Remarkably, her decision to go on to adopt three young children – one with Down's Syndrome, one autistic and one with cerebral palsy – and become a long-term foster mother to a fourth child with cerebral palsy, **and** care for two adults with learning disabilities still hasn't curbed her commitment to motherhood.

"I guess my maternal instincts are insatiable – I'd have another one tomorrow if I could!" said Debbie from her home in South Manchester, which she now shares with her partner and no less than six children.

Debbie refuses to see a distinction between her birth children and their adopted brothers. "I've got a family of six and two of them happen to be home grown," she explains. Neither does she accept that her choice to adopt children with particular problems has created any special challenges.

"We're just a normal family that does normal family things," she asserts.

The decision to adopt the first Down's Syndrome child was nothing less than an emotional necessity for Debbie. "I can't explain what it is but I have always wanted to adopt a child with Down's. I seem to have some sort of affinity to them. Adopting a Down's Syndrome child has been nothing less than a burning desire even before I had my birth children and I just love them."

After being approved as an adopter, Debbie sent several letters to social services teams across the region enquiring whether they were aware of any Down's Syndrome children needing a new home.

The letter landed on the desk of a social worker who, as the letter landed on her desk, was starting to look for a new home for a baby called Paul who had been born that day with Down's. Debbie believes it was fate.

It took six weeks for the arrangements to be finalised. "Paul was with a foster mother and when she finally handed him over to me it was like a dream come true. When she gave me Paul, she gave me the world."

Paul is now 12:"Very cheeky and a real star," says Debbie.

'Home grown' children Charlie and Jayne have given their mother every encouragement. "They've been fantastic and very supportive. If they would have had any doubts or concerns, I wouldn't have done it."

There was a four-year gap before 8-month-old David joined the family as Debbie's second adoption. Now aged nine, he has Down's Syndrome and is also autistic.

"I'd been talking and thinking about it for a while, and the more you talk about it, the more it becomes a reality!"

Michael was the third adoption after a break of two years. Now aged seven, he is severely brain damaged and has cerebral palsy.

Both David and Paul have contact through letters with their parents: "That's never been a problem," says Debbie. "We just accept the situation as we accept the boys."

Despite the inevitable additional demands of caring for children with these conditions, Debbie insists that her extensive family is just like any other. "We have normal holidays; we go out for meals – we're just a family.

"In fact, it's probably the case that we have a better family life than most – I accept my children for what they are. They're all individuals and my expectations of them are that they do the best they can.

Debbie added: "I wake up every morning to smiling faces and to kids who tell me they love me. That's my definition of bliss."

She has a word of advice for anyone considering adopting children with any kind of special needs.

“They have just the same rights as any other child – they shouldn’t ever be written off just because they’re different. You should look for the person inside. They are wonderful children to look after and so rewarding but you have to remember to fight for them just as you would for any other child.

“When it comes to services such as allowances, respite care and special equipment, got for it and don’t take no for an answer from your local social services!”

“These children are just fantastic and I wouldn’t be without them.”