

Meet the Adopter:

Jennifer

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I am a single adopter who made the decision to adopt after hearing, during National Adoption Week, that single people could adopt. I have adopted, separately, two beautiful little girls.

I truly enjoyed the adoption course and the process of my assessment. It helped me to remember things that had been filed away in the recesses of my brain. I realised how much my family and friends meant to me, and lots of things I had forgotten which had influenced my life and who I am today.

I have just adopted daughter number two - yet five years ago I thought it would never happen, while I anxiously waited for a match! My first daughter came into my life after weeks of introductions. This was to be the best day of my life. She was globally developmentally delayed (this means she had delay in all areas of development) but she brought sunshine with her. She had almost no speech and walked badly when she first came to me.

We have bi-annual letterbox contact with her parents, and we see her four siblings twice a year. She found the sibling contact very difficult in the early days, mostly because of her speech, but likes to see them now and enjoys the day out.

My second daughter was difficult to place because of her birth mum's mental health problems, and her quirky nature. I am not saying it has been plain sailing - the first couple of months were very difficult - but now we are over the hill and things are much better, as she settles and feels secure. We have annual letterbox contact with her mum and grandmother.

Reading this, you may think that it has all been hard work (and at times it has been) but I would not change a day of it now. I have great support from friends and family (who live far away) and could not manage without it. I have two wonderful daughters who I hope will grow into lovely young women, feeling loved and secure. Seeing them together is my reward.

My one bit of advice to prospective adopters is to enjoy the process - the courses, the assessment, the panel and the waiting - because one day it will be worth it. Every child brings something with them that will light up your life.

Meet the Adopter and Meet the Children are based on real stories but names, locations and details have been changed to protect the identities of those involved. Any children featured are not waiting for families to come forward, but other people are. Call or click today to find out more about adopting with Hampshire and being an adoptive parent.,

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Meet the Adopter: Mark & Tracey

Mark & Tracey

"Adoption has provided me with a loving family and a place to belong to – it has given me a chance in life," said Chloe, 14 and adopted daughter of Mark and Tracey.

"We always wanted to have two children and when we realised we were not going to have a second child naturally we thought about adopting. It was a long process and quite emotional, as you take a long look at yourselves and your own childhood which is something people normally would not do. Our social worker was helpful. We had one child approved for us but the child's foster carer then said she wanted to keep her so that was a difficult time for us".

Later the same year they were matched with Chloe who had just turned four. "We remember going to see Chloe for the first time: she was the little face at the window and had her hair in pigtails. She was so excited. We were excited, too. We had one hour together and we fell in love with her. We were happy and scared as we knew this was the start of a life long commitment. We have had 10 years of ups and downs and we would have loved to have had Chloe from a baby but we make the most of the time we do have with her".

"The professionals around us have been really helpful: it has been an holistic package and we know that, together, we are trying to give Chloe the best life chances. The support and post adoption work is so valuable and it certainly has helped our family grow stronger. Our lives are different now and more rich for having our lovely smiley daughter join our family."

"When I knew that mum and dad wanted to adopt I was excited and scared," says Gemma, Mark & Tracey's own daughter. "I was worried about losing them, as up to then I'd had them all to myself. But now it feels as though she has always been with us, part of us."

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Meet the Adopter:

Peter & Carole

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We are a married couple in our mid/late 30's. We were matched with two delightful, highly energetic and thoroughly exhausting little boys.

During a month of introductions, they walked into our home as if they owned it and did the same at their new grandparents, aunts and uncles. We felt they were here to stay!

Our older little boy has a significant speech and language delay and sees his pediatrician about mild epilepsy as well. However, he is making huge progress with both and is a delight to be around.

Like many couples, after several failed fertility treatments we decided adoption was the route for us. After an initial interview with Children's Services we were eventually invited to attend a training course. We were a little daunted by a 4 day course at first but found the experience very useful. An important bonus of the course was the opportunity to meet couples all coming to adoption for different reasons.

We covered issues we'd otherwise never have thought of and the course helped us to see adoption more from the child's point of view, especially areas related to birth family. Contact was an area we felt quite skeptical about however the course was enlightening in helping us to understand the reasons why contact promotes good self esteem in children placed for adoption. In our particular case, one of the boys has letterbox contact with his father on an annual basis and they both have 'letterbox' contact with their mother every year and a 'face to face' contact every year as well.

Having recently completed the first 'face to face' contact, it is a rewarding and worthwhile experience for all concerned and, in the future, we can see it giving the children the chance to keep in touch with their roots. It will also give us the opportunity to fill in some missing information about their family history.

Knowing what we know now, would we still contact Children's Services? Absolutely! It is wonderful to be a family and give love, a home and support to 2 little boys who desperately needed it.

Don't be fooled by all the positives here; having two children suddenly entering the lives of a childless couple is an exhausting process. There are moments of extreme joy and also extreme pressure when you wonder whether you are up to the challenge of bringing up two children.

Strong relationships and support networks are essential – you need a rock to lean on when things get tough, someone who will support you, talk with you, make constructive suggestions and, beyond all, let you know what a fantastic mother or father you are.

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Meet the Adopter:

Chris & Jo + Marie

Chris and Jo

We had always had a small inkling that adoption might be part of our family story. One summer we had two young lads who had been orphaned by AIDS come to stay with us, and that experience started our journey. Initially we had considered adopting from an overseas country, but when we realised that many British children were growing up without any sense of 'home' or 'family', our thoughts turned to adopting locally.

At the end of the assessment process we were quickly matched with two boys aged two and four, to add to our own two children. Then the fun really started! It was both a joy and a challenge to knit together the two halves of our new family. Our two children were so accepting of their two adopted brothers, and rose to the challenge of being a big brother and sister with zeal.

Five years down the line, our family appears just like any other, but with a whole host of experiences that we would never have had, and with a family that feels like a family, taking on the tough times and the great times together, and with two extra sons who now know what 'home' and 'family' really mean!.

Marie

"Adoption had been in the back of my mind for many years and as I was approaching my 40th birthday and single, I decided now was the time to take some action.

I didn't know if it was possible to adopt as a single person but the phone call to Adoption Services left me feeling very positive and I knew it was the right thing for me. Following that call, I attended an information event, I was the only single person there amongst the couples and this continued throughout the process at training events etc but I was always made to feel welcome by all.

Once I was assigned my social worker for the assessment process, the pace of the assessment picked up. The sessions make you think a lot about your own life, upbringing and what you could offer to a child. Panel day soon came round and I was very nervous but the social worker was great and when the decision came back positive, I cried tears of joy!

The next part was the waiting, waiting to be matched. As the weeks, months passed, others from my course were being matched, but still no call for me. Then, 15 months later, on a cold winter's evening in early January the phone call came. I had been linked to a little boy who was just about to turn 4 years old.

It's been 4 months now since he came to live with me and my life is unrecognisable. I am now the proud mum of a 4 year old boy who has just started school. He seems to have settled in well, adjusted to his new surroundings, my friends and family and his new mummy.

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Meet the Adopter:

Gemma & Mike

Gemma & Mike

I totally understand why the adoption process is thorough and takes time," said Gemma who is now mum to a very lively four-year-old little girl called Katie after she adopted her through Hampshire County Council. "It's a big step to take and you are dealing with very vulnerable children so adopters have to be challenged and prepared. When you are a birth parent the cycle of things means you slowly get to know your little one but when you adopt you suddenly have his lively toddler with their own thoughts and ideas join your family and it can seem like a whirlwind has descended!"

Katie has been Gemma and Mike's daughter for around 18 months and Gemma says she is so proud to be Katie's mum and has loved every minute of it. So much so they are now embarking on the process for a second time to adopt a sister for Katie. "Katie grew up for the first two years of her life in a very busy foster home with other children around her," said Gemma. "She's looking for company and we want her to have someone she can grow up with who shares her experience of being adopted."

Gemma and her husband, Mike, decided to adopt five years ago after 15 years of trying to conceive and a series of miscarriages. As part of her own preparation she met adoptive parents which she found invaluable and she now plays a part in supporting others through an online forum and blog. "The adoption process can be a tough and challenging one and we were warned of the possibilities of children having health problems or taking time to attach to us," said Gemma. "We had a few anxious moments but within ten minutes of meeting Katie she was climbing on our laps and a meeting scheduled to be a short introductory meeting turned into a three hour visit. Ten days later she came to us for an overnight stay and she never left us. She is who she is, not because she's adopted, but because she's a person in her own right and we are so blessed to have her in our lives."

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Meet the Adopter:

David & Emma

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"We went from no children to having two very active little boys almost overnight," said David who with his wife Emma decided to adopt after more than eight years of trying to have a baby. "We could have gone down the IVF route but we thought we would rather use the money supporting two children who needed it," added David.

David said he has seen much written about the adoption process and how long it takes but says having had personal experience of adoption he totally understands the need for thorough processes. "The authorities have to be thorough and makes sure the placements are right – these are some of the most vulnerable children. You have to be sure the match is right, right for them and right for the adoptive parents. It is not a process you would want to rush – it has to be about what is best for the child," he said.

He said once he and Emma had been matched with Richard and John their family doubled in size within around six months. "It's quite a challenge so you really do need a good support network of friends and family," he said. "It can be really helpful if they are willing to pitch in and take some of the more mundane tasks off your hands so in those early days you can concentrate on getting to know your children and helping them settle in to a new family."

Richard and John were siblings and David said they settled in quite quickly. He said he felt this was helped by the fact that they were still quite young and had only been in a foster placement for a year so hadn't become too attached to another family. "Watching them begin to grow into well rounded little boys has been a joy," said David.

A year ago the couple experienced further joy when they had their own little girl to complete their family. "After resigning ourselves to not having our own birth children it was quite a surprise and at first we were worried the boys would feel put out by the arrival of our daughter Lucy."

"Of course we have our ups and downs like any family but the boys are so protective of Lucy – we really couldn't have asked for more of them. They have been fantastic from day one."

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Meet the Adopter: Carole & Andy

Carole & Andy

"Anyone who thinks adoption is second best has got it totally wrong," said Carole from the New Forest. "It's as wonderful as giving birth to your own child," added Carole who is proud mum to five year old Bea and says it's the best decision she and her husband Andy ever made.

Carole had resigned herself to being childless after IVF and a frozen embryo transfer treatment failed. "Infertility can be so crushing," said Carole. "I thought I wasn't going to be a mum then I bumped into a friend who was leaving work to become an adoptive parent. She encouraged me to make some enquiries, I'd heard it was tough but she said it was nowhere near as tough as IVF and the outcome was so positive so that set us thinking."

Carole said she found it a tough but really interesting process and said social workers assigned to her and her husband were so supportive throughout. She and Andy are now embarking on a second adoption to find a sister for Bea and praise Hampshire County Council for having adapted the process for second timers. "Many local authorities make you go through exactly the same process again which does seem a waste of time and resources," said Carole. "Thankfully Hampshire has modified it to make it easier for second-timers so you don't duplicate some of the sessions which you have to do as a first-time adopter."

Carole praised the support she has had from social workers but also important has been the support from other adoptive parents she has met through the process and on an online forum which she started. "It really does help having people who know what you are going through and understand the highs and lows that you can feel as you go through the process. As you go through the process you learn a lot about yourself and your family dynamics but it also helps you to realise that you have such a lot to offer a child which is so important.

"The forum support has been great – we meet up with the children, which is as good for them as it is for us parents. You can think your child's behaviour is because they're adopted but when you get together with other parents you realise most of the time the tempers and tantrums are simply because they are children! I wouldn't change anything about the last few years."

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