



THE ADOPTION RATE IS DOWN BY 62%

SO IS THE SUCCESS OF IVF TO BLAME?

Adoption is seen by many as a last resort, but *Eleni Kyriacou* says it's the best decision she's ever made



THE FIRST TIME I ever saw my two sons was in a park. Ryan, six, was racing the other kids from his foster home, while his brother Aaron, four, was shouting at the top of his voice, 'Come on!' I was sitting on a bench with my husband, Andrew, and we watched from behind the Sunday papers as they zoomed past, oblivious to us. Their foster carer had arranged this as a way for us to see them at play, just being themselves, taking the pressure off them and us. A few days later they met us as their new mum and dad.

Last week, it was reported that adoptions have fallen by 62%. Some say this is due to the rising success of IVF, but others believe it's more likely to reflect a 2013 ruling that obliges social workers to prove that 'kinship care' (ie, extended families stepping in) has

been explored before children are adopted. Others think the snail-like pace of the system may be to blame.

It took us over two years from our first enquiry to the boys living with us. There was a nine-month assessment, then an 18-month wait to be 'matched'. Yet, despite all this, nothing could prepare us for the reality: being woken that first morning at 6am by two little strangers peeping around the doorway asking for 'beckfast'.

It was summer and we spent the six-week school break getting to know each other. We tried not to overwhelm them with hugs and said they could call us by our first names till they felt in here – tap on chest – that they wanted to call us 'Mum' and 'Dad'. And when they did, it took a while before they were able to say it without giggling. It was like gently falling in love.

Eventually, they met new aunts, cousins and grandparents and seemed happy to be claimed by their new family. They also had a birth family – loving grandparents and older siblings who we agreed they could see every few months – and it took a while for the boys to understand you *can* love two families at once, and it wasn't a betrayal to either.

There were ups and downs – in the first few months, any big tellings-off were taken as rejection and met with tantrums. That said, the early days seemed fairly idyllic, but it hasn't all been easy (three words: tricky teenage years). Today, they're 20 and 19. One's working abroad, the other's still at home and it's a joy to have watched them develop.

I understand the allure of biological children and IVF; we had three cycles. Had the IVF worked, I'm sure we would have been thankful. But I'm glad it didn't; we would have missed out on bringing up these two amazing boys who we were somehow destined to have in our lives.

Both Andrew and I agree that adoption is the best thing we've ever done. It's not for everyone, but the lengthy process does help you decide if it's for you. Adopting is a positive act that should be chosen for its own sake, not as a consolation prize because IVF has failed. You have to really want *these* children, not just be desperate for any children. It's not about them filling a hole in your life; it's about you providing a home, stability and love. It's as much – if not more – about what you can do for them, rather than the other way around.