

## Peacemaker Award Article (Deborah Willett)

Deborah's heart for children began at a very early age. At the age of 9, she was presented with the opportunity to be a mother's helper. With a newborn and a three-year-old in the home, this mother saw something that allowed her to trust Deborah to help at a vulnerable time in her life. This moment marked Deborah's life forever and fostered in her a heart that longed to love and care for children.

When the time came for Deborah to have children of her own, the road was anything but easy. With her very first child (and only biological child out of 13 total), she faced complications during his birth that almost cost Deborah her life. Deborah was able to make it through and it set her life on course that would be wrought with both unspeakable tragedy and awe-inspiring hope. All along the way, Deborah has brought children into her life and home that have had unique histories of trauma and challenges. Even when others might have seen too much pain and heartache, Deborah saw an opportunity to love and serve in a way that could only make sense through the lens of faith.

Deborah's first adoption opportunity came through her local church. One of the pastors had recently become responsible for his niece, and he approached Deborah with the opportunity to adopt her. Deborah made the decision in faith, and she continued to make that decision with numerous other children in need of a home and a loving caregiver.

Deborah's journey led her to being a GRANDFamily in 2009, when she was asked by Child Protective Services to take in her 22-month-old granddaughter in order to prevent her from going into the foster system. This event propelled Deborah into serving children in multiple ways, including work in Special Education, Juvenile and Adult Probation, Drug and Alcohol, and the Child Welfare system.

"I've given up opportunities in this life for what God has in Kingdom for me."

Deborah has sacrificed earthly pursuits because she feels that the children for whom she has had a chance to love and serve are worth it. She sees each of the children that she serves with unique needs and stories. Something that has helped Deborah with each decision she has faced is that God has only asked for her yes, one day at a time. With days that can be filled with tremendous amounts of stress and uncertainty, Deborah continues to say yes for what God has for her, one day at a time. She firmly believes that every child deserves to have someone believe in their willingness to live the life that God has for them.