



**Building for the Future provides support to lots of families of disabled children. Here, we share the story of single mum Lucy Walton. She talks about the past and present challenges she has faced bringing up William, 5, Emma, 14, who has global learning and co-ordination delays, and Polly, 11, who is on the autistic spectrum.**

"I think I always knew that Emma would need additional help; she failed to reach her milestones and was more than a couple of steps behind her peers. What Emma did have going for her was her extremely sunny gentle nature, her drive to always work hard and that fact that she had a great laugh - everybody loved Emma.

Polly was three before a paediatrician confirmed a diagnosis of Autism and so we went through the same process as we did with Emma - getting statements, selecting schools. Polly has behavioural issues which have become harder to manage the bigger she has got but she does have the most amazing social skills and this a real strength.

Coming to terms with my divorce this year has been tricky for Polly and she has struggled to manage her behaviour at school. Her teachers have been brilliant but it has been tough getting outside help and support. I have felt like such a nag, and the worst mother in the world. Why is my beautiful daughter so vile at school and yet at home we have so few difficulties? She would trash the classroom, throw chairs etc. She would take her clothes off for attention and she practically spent the whole of the summer term in isolation.

This totally took over my life. How I managed to work 20 hours a week with all this going on I'll never know. I ended up taking Polly to and from school as she was not safe on school transport. After a very settled summer holiday she has done extremely well and the autumn term has been exceptionally good for her.

On a daily basis neither of the girls can confidently dress themselves and need help with things like personal care or cutting up their food. They also have no road sense, and at times when you are trying to juggle everything just leaving the house can be quite dangerous.

We laugh and cry together and the children are a real blessing to me. I have great support from my family and friends, and I now have good support from the Disabled Children's Team. It hasn't been easy, and at times makes me want to pull my hair out. I am only too aware that parents with a disabled child have so much to deal with each day - and that's before 8.30 in the morning!

And then life throws other challenges at you, such as when Emma broke her foot recently on a school trip. It was laughable. There we were in my Victorian terrace with a commode (no downstairs loo) walking frame, wheel chair (that wouldn't fit through the front door), a bowl for washing her in and a camp bed in the dining room. We were like that for five weeks.

Do you know, we coped really well and at the end of that, when the plaster was taken off, I thought I was an ok mother; I can cope in a crisis. I suppose my biggest challenge is yet to come - a mainstream boy!!"