

'Special needs' child became special to them

Lemmie and Edna Charley of Glennallen had four children when they decided that they wanted to have another boy. But they wanted to be sure it was a boy and began thinking about adopting a child.

What they didn't think

about at first was adopting a child with "special needs," a child with a physical problem or defect.

But then they met little David, a two-year-old bundle of charm with one minor defect — he had a hole in an ar-

tery leading into his heart.

"At first we said we didn't want someone who needed a lot of care," says Edna as she watched her little boy as he sat on Lemmie's lap.

But then, she said, they spent an afternoon with him and he ended up returning home with them to stay forever.

"We made the right decision," she says with a warm quiet smile as the little boy runs to big brother, Frank.

The Charleys' decision helped them to earn a place on the list of Alaskans honored recently for their efforts in adopting and working with the special needs program. The Charleys and eight other couples received plaques from Dorcas Hardy, undersecretary of the U.S. Department of

Health and Human Services while she was in Anchorage.

Adopting a child with special needs for the Charleys meant they had a little boy with a heart problem that, although corrected surgically, still would require watching until the boy is six, said Mrs. Charley. Such a problem could be serious in rural Alaska, away from major medical care.

Thus far, though, no major problems have developed.

One problem they do face, however, is that they know little of David's medical history because he had gone through many foster homes before finally going to live with them.

But, they are taking one day at a time.

The Charleys are not new to caring for children with special needs in other ways. While liv-

ing in Anchorage before their move to Glennallen they were foster parents to two brothers for four years. When they moved to Glennallen the boys had to stay in Anchorage for special education.

Other state residents to be honored for their work with special children are:

Jim and Dawn Richardson, Anchorage region, who adopted a handicapped boy in November 1980.

Tom and Debbie Gilbert, Anchorage region, who adopted brothers who displayed serious medical and emotional problems. The Gilberts are active in the support and recruitment work.

Russell and Marlene Sahr, Anchorage region, who adopted a severely handicapped boy. They have two natural children and want to adopt again.

Shirley and Richard Lewis, Fairbanks region, who have adopted two handicapped children, one with Downs Syndrome, the other with a severe congenital heart disease.

Dorothy Bradshaw, a single parent from the Fairbanks region who adopted four children, the last child requiring much special attention.

Frances Milner, Anchorage region, who recently retired from the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. He continuously fought for the Anchorage Permanency Planning Unit and ran the Unit for a number of years. He started the Adoption of Children with Special Needs Programs in Alaska.

Commissioner Robert L. Smith, Ph.D., from the Juneau region, who manages the Alaska State Department of Health and Social Services. The Agency has provided permanent homes for older children; sibling groups; physically, emotionally or mentally handicapped children; and minority children.

