They say that to understand someone, you must walk in his shoes. Not wanting her children to grow up thinking that everyone has the same advantages, Jocelyn Armbruster temporarily moved her family to the Flatlanders Inn, a transitional housing community that supports people at risk.

Armbruster, 33, her husband, and three young sons stayed at the Flatlanders for a year.

“It was a family decision. We felt it was important for us to spend some time giving as a family and teaching our kids that the world is full of diversity and that we all need love,” Armbruster says. “Flatlanders Inn is a community that helps those that really want to get back on their feet, usually working with people who have gone through a hard time or struggled with addictions.”

In the beginning, it was not an easy transition for the young family. One of Armbruster’s sons was homesick, and she too had to learn to share her family and how to trust others with her children. But she knew she was doing the right thing.

“One of the things our family learned was that having a family is a privilege. We shared our lives with many people who have never had a family: nowhere to go at Christmas, no one to acknowledge their birthday,” she says. “In fact, no one who cared for or looked out from them at all.”

Acceptance of others is nothing new for Armbruster. When she was told her eldest son would have Down’s syndrome, she was prepared to love him either way. He turned out to be healthy, but her second son, Luke, has atypical Arthrogryposis Amyoplasia (AMC), a condition that results when a fetus isn’t able to move sufaciently in the womb.

Rather than send Luke to a fully accessible school, Armbruster was determined that her son would attend the same school as his siblings and friends. Next year, the school will have an elevator, but until that point, Armbruster and her husband Sherwood go to the school each day to help their son up and down the stairs.

“I used to think that parents of children with special needs were just trying to make the best of a bad situation by being positive. Today I know they were absolutely sincere,” says Armbruster. “There is a purity of life and love that shines through frailty in our world. Luke embodies this, teaching me to slow down, to look for the precious and be thankful for the things we take for granted. I am proud of who he is.”

Last November, the family fostered an infant boy who was in desperate need of a home.

“Although we were thinking adoption, we saw an immediate need for fostering. Sadly, Winnipeg is the orphan capital of North America. We have many kids in our city that need love and care. How could we say no?,” Armbruster says. “Often people say, ‘how can you handle not knowing how long you will have him for?’ but I don’t really know how long I will have my birth children for. I love them anyway. I hope and pray that they will have long healthy lives. But no matter how long or how short I have any of my kids for, I will love them each day that I have with all that is in me.”