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Gift of life saves baby boy

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NINE-week-old Dane White is too young to understand he owes his life to a child who wasn't so lucky.

But his mother Liv is unlikely to forget.

Dane would not have survived without surgery to replace the aortic valve in his heart with one belonging to a child who had died.

His own valve had been eaten away by a bacterial infection.

Amid the joy of being able to take her baby home from hospital this week, Mrs White's thoughts were also with another child's grieving family who saved her son's life.

"They gave us our son back," she said at Brisbane's Prince Charles Hospital, emotion overwhelming her.

Like hearts, livers and kidneys, donor tissue is always in "precarious" supply but particularly so in children.

And adult valves are too big to be transplanted into babies as young as Dane.

"It's rare to receive tissue from such young donors; that's why this gift is extra special," said Queensland Heart Valve Bank manager Lisa Sparks.

Dane's cardiac surgeon Peter Pohlner said that, unlike with full heart transplants where the donor has to remain on a ventilator for the organ to be suitable, heart valves could be retrieved up to 24 hours after a person had died.

They could then be stored in liquid nitrogen for two to three years before being transplanted.

Dane's doctors said that, without the generosity of a mourning family willing to donate their dead child's tissue, he would have certainly died.

"The surgery was very high risk and it was only embarked on because we were sure he would have died without it," his cardiologist Jim Morwood said.

"I think he's just meant to be here," Mrs White said.

"He's obviously got something to do on this planet."

In Queensland last year, 35 people became organ donors while 245 donated tissue.

For more information or to become an organ donor phone the Australian Organ Donor Register on 1800 777 203.



THANKFUL . . . Liv White hugs her nine-week-old son Dane, who has received a replacement aortic valve in his heart. Picture: Annette Dew

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