Auntie hosts Big Chocolate Tea party to thank charity for ‘Home from Home’

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The auntie of a little girl who was involved in a serious car accident that left her fighting for life is joining in The Sick Children’s Trust’s Big Chocolate Tea campaign to thank the charity for its support.

Helen Cartledge, 40, from New Whittington, is taking part in The Sick Children’s Trust’s biggest, annual fundraiser this month by holding a Big Chocolate Tea party at her work, Adgiftdiscount Limited. The event will raise vital funds for the charity which supports families with seriously ill children in hospital with free ‘Home from Home’ accommodation.

On Boxing Day in 2015, Helen’s niece, Rio Wade Cartledge, was rushed to Sheffield Children’s Hospital after being seriously hurt in a car crash before being immediately transferred to Leeds General Infirmary (LGI). Rio required lifesaving liver surgery and remained in a coma for five weeks at the specialist hospital, over 50 miles away from home. During this time, her parents Ashley Cartledge and Gaynor Chambers, were given free ‘Home from Home’ accommodation by The Sick Children’s Trust. The couple were supported at the charity’s Eckersley House located within the hospital grounds and just a two minute walk away from the ward. Helen, whose previous Big Chocolate Tea raised £740, says:

“Saying thank you to The Sick Children’s Trust will never be enough. Rio was in a critical condition following the accident and because of the charity’s ‘Homes from Home’ we could be by her side every single day without having the fear that the worst may happen and we wouldn’t be with her in time.

“When Rio underwent treatment at LGI, Ashley and Gaynor were never more than just a few minutes away from her bedside as they had a ‘Home from Home’ at Eckersley House. There, the nurses could call them as there was a direct telephone line to the ward in their room. This meant they were content leaving their daughter’s bedside to go and have a shower or eat some food. Also, when the rest of our family visited, we could all gather there and talk privately about Rio’s progress over a cuppa. It gave us a bit of normality in a situation that had thrown our lives into complete turmoil.”

After ten weeks at LGI, Rio was transferred to Sheffield Children’s Hospital where her family were supported at Treetop and Magnolia Houses, run by The Sick Children’s Trust. Since Rio’s recovery, her family have been tirelessly fundraising to say thank you to the charity for its support. Helen continues:

“We have had so much support from friends, family and the entire village. From knitting little Easter Chicks to fundraise for Eckersley House, hosting Big Chocolate Teas and being the nominated charity for our local festival, Shedfest – it’s been incredible. Altogether, I think we’ve raised around £6,000.

“We had no idea about the charity and the fantastic work it does until Rio had her accident. It was a godsend and not just for the practicalities. The teams were amazing. Jane and the girls went above and beyond ensuring that there was a bed in the room for Rio’s older sister, Ebony, to stay. She was missing her parents a lot, so it meant they could spend the weekends together.

“Then at Treetop and Magnolia Houses, when Rio was on her road to recovery she was allowed to spend the majority of the day at the houses eating her favourite meals, lying on the sofa and watching DVDs. It was a homely environment and exactly what she needed – it was therapeutic for her.

“I’ve said it a thousand times but we really can’t thank The Sick Children’s Trust enough for what it’s done for our family. The charity is so important to us that we’ll always keep speaking to people about it and sharing our experience because it could mean one more family is supported when they need it most.”

The Sick Children’s Trust runs ten ‘Homes from Home’ across the country, located at leading specialist paediatric hospitals. Every year the charity provides much-needed emotional and practical support to around 4,000 families with seriously ill children in hospital. Although the accommodation is free of charge to families, the charity relies entirely on voluntary donations to run its houses and is calling for the nation to join in with Big Chocolate Tea so it can continue to help thousands of families stay together with their sick child when it matters most. Eckersley House Manager, Jane McHale, says:

“Rio’s family have been fantastic and their support means the world to us. They wanted to fundraise enough to cover the cost of their stay and have gone way beyond that, raising nearly £6,000! It’s

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incredible.

“It costs us £30 to support a family for one night in a ‘Home from Home’ and Big Chocolate Tea is a great way to raise money for families who need a ‘Home from Home’ so they can be there with their seriously ill child. If you can hold a Big Chocolate Tea party, bake off or cake sale and raise £30, you will be helping keep a family like Rio’s together during the worse imaginable time.”

While the campaign runs during the month of May, supporters can choose to take part in Big Chocolate Tea at any point during the year and will receive a pack full of goodies to help host their event.

To find out how you can get involved with Big Chocolate Tea, please email bigchoctea@sickchildrenstrust.org or visit www.sickchildrenstrust.org/bigchoctea/.

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