Ava survives liver transplant to attend school this August

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A little girl who underwent a liver transplant at just nine months old is packing her bag, putting on her shoes and heading to school for the first time this August.

When she was just seven weeks old, five year old Ava Hainey was diagnosed with a rare liver disease and rushed to the liver unit at Leeds General Infirmary (LGI) – over 200 miles away from home in Paisley, Scotland. Ava underwent major lifesaving surgery, however at just eight months Ava went into liver failure again and was urgently taken back to LGI for a liver transplant. **Ava's Mum, Ashley Ewing, 30, says:**

"Although we were expecting the news that Ava would need a lifesaving liver transplant, when it came to it - it didn't seem real. Ava was just so young, she was barely a year old – we didn't know how such a little person would be able to cope with such a major procedure.

"It was a really trying time for our family. We waited anxiously for a donor, and every time it seemed one had been found for Ava, our hopes were dashed. We were so scared that she wouldn't get a liver in time that my husband, James, had decided that he would be a donor for Ava. The night the procedure was due to go ahead, we got the call**.** There was a liver for Ava. It seemed like our prayers had finally been answered."

Throughout Ava's treatment at LGI her family were supported with free 'Home from Home' accommodation run by The Sick Children's Trust at Eckersley House, one of ten 'Homes from Home' the charity runs across the country. Mum Ashley and Dad James were supported at Eckersley House on three separate occasions and during her transplant they were given keys to Eckersley's private transplant flat, minutes away from the ward Ava was being treated in. **Ashley continues:**

"We couldn't have done it without The Sick Children's Trust, they kept our family together when we most needed it. The drive from our home to the hospital took over four hours and I just couldn't bear being that far whilst Ava was undergoing such a serious operation. Staying at Eckersley House meant that I was just minutes away from my baby's bedside, and that James and I could be with her night and day while she recovered.

"Eckersley House really helped to take the pressure off, not just the practicality of being so close but not having to pay for a hotel really meant a lot as I was on maternity leave and James had to take special leave to be with us. Having a home at Eckersley House really made the world of difference."

Ava stayed in hospital for a further five weeks to recover, and has only gone from strength to strength as she's got older. She has attended nursery for three years now, but this August will be joining Glencoats Primary School in Paisley. **Ashley continues:**

"We've just got back from a caravan holiday and Ava had an absolute ball, but she's already so excited to start school - she's got a brand new pair of shoes picked out and her uniform ready. She's still quite small for her age but I'm sure she'll grow into it!

"When we were desperately waiting for a donor liver, we didn't even think we'd reach this day, so it feels very emotional to see her starting school for the first time. We are so proud of how far Ava's come, she's shown everyone just how strong she is and that she can take on anything that comes her way."

Each year, The Sick Children's Trust supports around 4,000 families with seriously ill children in hospital. Alongside Eckersley House's self-contained liver transplant flat where Ava and her parents stayed, it has 22 family bedrooms, eight bathrooms and three fully equipped kitchens. Although the charity's ten 'Homes from Home' are free of charge for families, it costs The Sick Children's Trust £30 to support a family for one night, and it relies entirely on voluntary donation and fundraising.

Eckersley House Manager, Jane McHale says:

"It is families like Ava's that really need the charity's support so that they can be kept by their loved one's hospital bedside. Ashley and James live over 200 miles away from Leeds and it would have been a huge amount of stress having to travel back and forth every day, not to mention having to leave Ava's side. Staying in a 'Home from Home' eases some of those worries and allows families to focus on what's most important-their child.

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“We wish Ava all the best at school – we’re sure that she will continue to show everyone her strength and determination in her classes!”

For further information about The Sick Children’s Trust, please visit http://www.sickchildrenstrust.org/

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