Bedford couple call on community to back charity's Christmas appeal that kept their family together

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A Bedfordshire couple who were given a place to stay close to their baby's side when she underwent open heart surgery are backing The Sick Children's Trust's Together this Christmas appeal to help keep families like theirs together this festive period.

Hayley Partridge and Paul Bryan, from Bedford, found themselves 60 miles from home when their eight week old daughter, Molly, needed lifesaving open heart surgery at Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH). Molly (Partridge-Bryan), now six months, was born in June this year pale and floppy. It was discovered that she had a low red blood cell count, alongside a large hole in her heart and a smaller heart defect. Discussions began with GOSH about scheduling a surgery, and in the meantime Molly was allowed home. However over the following few weeks her condition deteriorated and she was soon admitted to the specialist London hospital. While Molly underwent and recovered from open heart surgery, Hayley and Paul were given a free place to stay by The Sick Children's Trust at its Rainbow House. The charity runs ten 'Homes from Home' giving families a warm and comfortable place to stay close to their child's hospital bedside. Despite the global pandemic, The Sick Children's Trust has kept its doors open to families, ensuring that they can be together and will continue to do so throughout the Christmas holidays.

Molly recovered well from her surgery and is now looking forward to celebrating her first Christmas. As they put up the Christmas Tree, Hayley and Paul are thinking about those whose child is in hospital, needing a 'Home from Home'. They are backing The Sick Children's Trust's Together this Christmas appeal which is asking for donations of £30 to give a family a place to stay for one night over the festive period. **Hayley said:**

"Rainbow House was an incredible support and in hindsight afforded us the space to process everything and be rational at an extremely emotional time. Our daughter needing major surgery at such a young age was a lot to take in, but the addition of the coronavirus and restrictions also had an impact.

"I recall my anxiety whilst on route in the ambulance of where we'd stay, what will happen and so on as we expected that her operation date would be further off. Fortunately, we barely had time to allow for worrying as everything was sorted and we were told we would have somewhere to stay, at The Sick Children's Trust's 'Home from Home'. We would have slept in the car to be with her.

"After spending just over a week in intensive care, we were allowed to bring Molly back home. Ever since her surgery she is a changed baby who is healthy, happy and no longer in heart failure. We are so grateful to the medical team and to The Sick Children's Trust, which gave us a monumental moment of strange normality and respite.

"We are now looking forward to celebrating Molly's first Christmas and will be going to my parents granny and grumpy, who are in our 'bubble'. It will be a very different quiet one from the usual big family gatherings, but we will no doubt be video chatting with all her uncles, aunties, cousins and her nanny."

The Sick Children's Trust wants to keep families together by their child's hospital bedside, and a donation of £30 can do that. **Jane Featherstone, Chief Executive at The Sick Children's Trust, said:**

"Our 'Homes from Home' give families with a seriously ill child in hospital one less thing to worry about. For Hayley and Paul it meant they could be with Molly for the entire day and have somewhere to come back to to rest, without worrying about travel or cost.

"This year, we need your support more than ever to keep families together with their child in hospital. We will be supporting families over the Christmas period, but can only do that with the public's support. With a donation of £30 from you to our Together this Christmas appeal, we can ease their worries and give them a place to stay and ensure that they can be together this Christmas."

To donate to The Sick Children's Trust's Christmas appeal, visit sickchildrenstrust.org/donate

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