# Cara Takes On 630 mile Trek to Thank Charities for Support

**Monday 7 November, 2016**

A local woman has challenged herself to complete the South West Coast Path walk in two months to raise money for The Sick Children's Trust alongside two other charities – Merley Community Pre-School and Meningitis Now – as thanks for the charities' support.

Cara Higgins, 46 from Merley, has already begun chipping away at the 630 mile route in a bid to raise money for the three charities which have supported her family. Cara, along with her sister Claire, is thanking The Sick Children's Trust for giving them free 'Home from Home' accommodation when Claire's daughter Emily was critically ill and survived a rare life-threatening condition caused by the *Epstein-Barr virus* (EBV). The virus induced hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis (HLH), a condition which meant her immune system wasn't able to fight infection and began to damage her own cells. Emily was diagnosed with the deadly condition in 2014 and, after initially being treated at her local and regional hospital; she was rushed to Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH) – miles away from home – in a bid to save her life.

The illness left Emily fighting for life as her organs began to shut down. For the following eight months, Emily underwent a number of operations and procedures including a bone marrow transplant to help her survive. After her transplant, to aid her recovery The Sick Children's Trust supported Emily, Cara and Claire by giving them free 'Home from Home' in the charity's Rainbow House, which has a self-contained bone marrow transplant (BMT) flat. Alongside the BMT flat, Rainbow House has eight family bedrooms which allow families to stay close to their seriously ill children. **Cara says:**

"Before we moved into Rainbow House, Claire would stay on the ward with Emily and I would stay down the corridor in the hospital accommodation. We were there for months and got used to the surroundings. However, when Emily began to get stronger we were offered the flat at The Sick Children's Trust's Rainbow House, and it was the best thing we could have hoped for.

"Without realising, we were becoming institutionalised, and Rainbow House helped us take those very important, but scary, steps back into the real world. Emily had to learn to do everything again including walking, and at Rainbow House we could start her recovery.

"Rainbow House also meant that my daughters and Emily's brothers could visit her. It kept them close to one another and it was something Emily looked forward to – having this 'Home from Home' really helped Emily recovery quicker."

Since leaving GOSH in July 2015, Emily has made a remarkable recovery and even gone back to school to do her GCSEs. **Cara continues:**

"It is so rare that anyone survives this condition – only a handful ever do. EBV with HLH is a devastating illness that affects every single part of you and Emily is incredibly courageous to take things in her stride the way she does. Her courage is what has inspired me to challenge myself to something that I know will be tough."

Cara's trek across the South West Coast Path will also be raising money for Merley Community Pre-School which supported the family by caring for Emily's brother, Oskar, when she was in hospital, and Meningitis Now, after in 2011 Cara nearly lost her own daughter, Freya, to meningitis and a brain abscess." **She continues:**

"I'm hoping to complete the 630 miles by December, and really do hope I can raise enough money for all three charities to make a difference. Having had my own daughter nearly die from meningitis I am really passionate about raising awareness of those symptoms through Meningitis Now, and to thank them for the support they have given Freya since her illness. Merley Community Pre-School were instrumental in supporting Oskar when his Mum and I were away at GOSH. I just want to say thank you as best I can to all the charities that have helped us when we've needed it."

**Sick Children's Trust's Rainbow House Manager, Sandra Williams, says:** "It is wonderful to hear just how well Emily is doing after such a worrying and tough battle. She has shown so much strength and

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power which is completely inspirational, so much so that her auntie is taking on a huge challenge in her name.

“It costs The Sick Children’s Trust £30 to support a family for one night in our ‘Home from Home’ accommodation, so the money Cara raises will go a long way in helping more families with sick children stay close to their hospital bedside.”

To support Cara, please visit: www.virginmoneygiving.com/carafundraising where you can donate for The Sick Children’s Trust and Meningitis Now, or visit her Facebook page to follow her journey and donate to Merley Community Pre-School: www.facebook.com/carasouthcoastwalk

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