Chalkwell United get onside to support The Sick Children's Trust

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A local football team have selected The Sick Children's Trust as their charity partner this season as thanks for supporting a team member's family after the birth of his second son in 2010.

The Sunday League team, who play in the Southend Borough Combination Veterans League, kicked off their fundraising challenge with a charity raffle at the team's annual presentation evening, scoring over £1,100 for The Sick Children's Trust.

Over the course of the next season, Chalkwell United hope to raise hundreds of pounds for the charity as thanks for supporting player Ian Cowen and his wife Louise with free 'Home from Home' accommodation over 40 miles from home when their son, Lewie, required lifesaving surgery at just one day old.

Louise's 20 week scan showed that her unborn baby had a rare condition called exomphalos which meant his bowels were protruding through a hole in his abdomen and were inside a sac. Doctors warned the couple that it was likely their son would require emergency surgery immediately after birth.

This was the case when, within a matter of hours after being born at Southend University Hospital, Lewie was rushed to The Royal London Hospital for a lifesaving operation. **38 year old Mum of two, Louise says:**

"Although we expected Lewie to need immediate treatment, nothing can prepare you for the shock of being separated from your baby straight after birth. I required major surgery and had to stay in Southend University Hospital, whilst my husband, Ian, drove to London.

"The drive to London from Southend takes two hours. Financially it was not feasible for Ian to stay in a hotel, but we knew that the four-hour round trip would have exhausted him. When The Sick Children's Trust approached him and said they had a 'Home from Home' called Stevenson House, that we could have a room here, and not to worry about paying for a place to stay in London, we were so relieved. Ian didn't want to leave Lewie under any circumstance and I was desperate to join him too. Knowing that we had somewhere to stay, so we could be together really gave us some peace of mind.

"We were supported at Stevenson House for the whole time Lewie was in hospital. Having a free 'Home from Home' meant that as soon as I was well enough I could be with Ian and my baby, and our older son James could stay too, meaning we could all be together. It really was a 'Home from Home' - there was a kitchen where we would cook home-made food, toys for James to play with, people to entertain him when we were preoccupied and nurses who could support us close by. And we were just minutes from Lewie's hospital bedside the whole time.

"What The Sick Children's Trust did for my family meant such a lot to us and had such a big impact at the time, especially for Ian when he was in London alone with Lewie and I was stuck in hospital back home, feeling guilty.

"Ian is now thrilled that the team he loves to play for have got behind the charity that supported all of us when we needed it most."

Chalkwell United, which has been voted Club of the Year for two consecutive seasons, hope to raise as much money as possible for The Sick Children's Trust. **Top scorer Paul Baxter, who is in charge of fundraising for the team, says:**

"I joined the team a couple of years ago and this season we have decided to make things more organised, focusing not only on the football, but also the social impact of the club. To choose The Sick Children's Trust as our first charity seemed like a great idea because of how much they helped Ian's family. Also, most of our members have families and so the idea of supporting a charity that is focused on keeping families together and helping with the recovery of sick children seemed like the best fit.

"The first fundraising event went well and we raised more than I had thought we would during the evening. I just hope that we can continue to raise money and awareness for The Sick Children's Trust over the course of the next season."

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The Sick Children's Trust runs ten 'Homes from Home' across the country, supporting families with seriously ill children in hospital. Although the accommodation is provided free of charge to families, it costs The Sick Children's Trust £30 to support a family for one night. **Community Fundraising Manager, Elisa Cappello-Dowd, says:**

"We're absolutely delighted to have been selected as Chalkwell United's charity of the year and we're so excited to hear all about what they have planned to raise money! They have got off to a great start with the recent raffle and the money will make a huge difference to us.

"As a charity, we rely entirely on voluntary donations to keep our ten 'Homes from Home' running, so with the money raised throughout the next season, we will be able to keep more families together when they have a seriously ill child in hospital."

To find out more about Chalkwell United and their fundraising events see:
https://www.facebook.com/ChalkwellUnited/

To donate to Chalkwell United and their chosen charity this season please see:
https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/chalkwellutdraffle

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