Dad and pals get muddy to raise over £3,000 for charity that kept him by sick baby's bedside

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A father of premature twins has raised almost £3,600 for The Sick Children's Trust and Addenbrooke's Charitable Trust (ACT) as thanks for keeping him by his baby daughter's side when she needed lifesaving treatment.

Rob Block, 30 from Bury St Edmunds, and six friends completed the 'Tough Mudder', a gruelling 12 mile obstacle course, last month in Grantham to raise money for two charities close to his family's hearts.

Twins Elodie and Felix were born six weeks early at West Suffolk Hospital. And before either Rob or his wife Roxanne had a chance to meet their newborns, doctors rushed the babies into the special care baby unit (SCBU) as both were struggling to breathe. Shortly afterwards, the worried couple were told that Elodie's condition was critical and she needed an emergency transfer to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) at The Rosie Hospital in Cambridge – over 35 miles away.

At just a few hours old, Elodie was separated from her twin and rushed to the specialist hospital, where she was diagnosed with a diaphragmatic hernia. At three days old she underwent lifesaving surgery, after doctors told her parents to prepare for the worst. Miraculously, Elodie survived and after spending a month recovering at The Rosie Hospital, she was transferred back to SCBU at West Suffolk Hospital. A few weeks later her proud parents took her home to re-join her brother Felix. **Dad, Rob, who was cheered on during the race by his 21 month old twins, says:**

"Completing the obstacle course was nothing compared to the trauma we experienced almost two years ago. We didn't even get to see our babies after they were born, which is how we knew something was seriously wrong.

"It was like being in a nightmare when just two hours after their birth, I was having to kiss Roxanne and Felix goodbye to go with Elodie to a different hospital miles away. I arrived at The Rosie Hospital, worried out of my mind, and it was such a relief when someone from The Sick Children's Trust met me in NICU to tell me they had a room for me in a place called Chestnut House. I hadn't even thought about where I would stay and assumed I would be sleeping in my car. Chestnut House was just the floor below NICU, so I was never more than a couple of minutes away from my poorly baby's bedside.

"Five days later, Roxanne came to stay at Chestnut House, but Felix remained in our local hospital. Although we were having to make journeys between both hospitals so we could see our babies, having Chestnut House right there at The Rosie Hospital made it more bearable.

"Neither of us could face going home. Our house was full of congratulations cards and flowers – and at the time we really thought we were going to lose our daughter. So having a space, away from home and away from the hospital wards to clear our heads, remain positive, and stay focused, really helped. Whilst we were resting in Chestnut House we read the story boards about other families who had been helped by the charity and it inspired us to fundraise in the future – we made a decision there and then that if Elodie pulled through we would do whatever we could to help other families who found themselves in a similar situation."

Chestnut House is one of two 'Homes from Home' in Cambridge which supports families with seriously ill children on NICU, while the charity's other 'Home from Home' Acorn House supports families with seriously ill children at Addenbrooke's Hospital. **Mum Roxanne adds:**

"My body had been through a lot of trauma and I was also very stressed and worried about my seriously ill daughter. To be able to rest and be supported by the team at Chestnut House once I was discharged from our local hospital was such a comfort during what was the worst time of my life.

"Chestnut House was clean and tidy and once I arrived I could even express milk that we needed to take back to West Suffolk Hospital each day for Felix. There was even a freezer to store it in right there in our room! The facilities were fantastic – my mum came to visit us and brought a lasagne and we were able to heat it up in the kitchen and then sit down round the table and enjoy a decent home-cooked meal. What seems like a small thing looking back made such a difference at the time.

"The Sick Children's Trust were amazing. Even though the time is still a bit of a blur for us, I don't know

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how we could have coped without the amazing support from Chestnut House and the team. When we couldn't sit on the ward with Elodie any longer, we didn't have to go far. We just popped down the stairs to Chestnut House where we were comforted by Abi and her team."

The Sick Children's Trust runs ten 'Homes from Home' across the country, giving families with seriously ill children free accommodation just minutes from their child's hospital bedside. **Chestnut House Manager, Abi Abdel-aal, says:**

"It was wonderful to see the twins when Rob and Roxanne popped in with the cheque for The Sick Children's Trust. Elodie has made a remarkable recovery.

"We would like to say a huge thank you to Rob and his friends for their amazing fundraising challenge – as a charity we rely on voluntary donations so we can continue to support families in the worst imaginable situations; the money that Rob and his friends have raised will make a big difference for many families."

To find out more about Elodie's journey and Rob and Roxanne's fundraising efforts, please visit

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

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