Dad completes huge fundraising challenge and raises over £5,600 for charity

Monday 30 April, 2018

The father of a baby girl who was born at just 27 weeks has completed an enormous sponsored cycling challenge to thank The Sick Children's Trust, Bliss and Addenbrooke's Charitable Trust for their support whilst his daughter was receiving lifesaving treatment in hospital, 60 miles from home.

Chris Penfold, 37, has raised £5,610 for three charities close to his heart by running and cycling the same route his premature daughter travelled in order to receive the lifesaving care she needed.

Dad Chris, from Chelmsford, was terrified when his wife, Laura, 32, went into labour 13 weeks early at home on 28 December 2016. Less than two hours later their daughter, Willow, was born at Broomfield Hospital weighing only 2lb 10oz. She was placed in a plastic bag to keep her temperature high and rushed to the special care baby unit (SCBU). Struggling for every breath, doctors made the decision to intubate tiny Willow and place her in an incubator before she was transferred 60 miles away to The Rosie Hospital in Cambridge for lifesaving treatment on the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). It was at this point that The Sick Children's Trust stepped in and offered the traumatised parents free 'Home from Home' accommodation at Chestnut House, located just moments from where Willow was receiving lifesaving treatment on NICU. **Dad, Chris, who raised £2,244 for The Sick Children's Trust, says:**

"When we arrived at The Rosie Hospital the doctors told us it was likely that Willow was going to have to stay in hospital until her due date, which was three months away. Without The Sick Children's Trust I don't know what we would have done, especially as our son Finley was so young and needed to be with his mum and dad. The Sick Children's Trust provided the three of us with a room in Chestnut House, but it was so much more than that.

"One of the reasons I decided take on Willow's journey on 31 March is because that was her due date. It is a significate date for us and one that is tinged with sadness. I wanted to make it into a positive occasion and one that marked a huge success rather than the sense of failure associated with not having 'made it' to that date. I wanted to thank the charities, like The Sick Children's Trust, who made our lives bearable and offered us both emotional and practical support. We had no idea such a charity existed before Willow was born. Now, having been supported by The Sick Children's Trust, I know exactly how important the charity is to families with a seriously ill child in hospital."

To say thank you to the charity for its help, Chris ran and cycled the route that Willow travelled in her first few weeks of life, from the moment Laura's waters broke, her delivery at Broomfield Hospital and then on to The Rosie Hospital in Cambridge where her specialist care began. **He continues:**

"My wife Laura and I have been fundraising since Willow was discharged because we want to give something back to the charities that gave so much to us. We have held bake sales and taken part in The Sick Children's Trust's annual Big Chocolate Tea campaign, but this latest fundraising event has by far been the most demanding!

"The first leg of the challenge was a run from our home to Broomfield Hospital, which took me 1 hour 41 minutes, then it was a cycle on to The Rosie Hospital, which took 2 hours 25 minutes. I had said that if I exceeded my fundraising target I would double the challenge and cycle back to Broomfield before running home. I raised 154% of my target and so that was decided! It took me 2 hours 31 minutes to cycle back to Broomfield Hospital and then a further 2 hours and 6 minutes to run back home. The whole challenge was 116 miles long and took me 8 hours and 44 minutes! I was absolutely exhausted when I got home, but Finley ran the last 100 metres home with me as a surprise. Thinking of Willow's tiny, fragile body when she was born, and everything she had done to survive, kept me going."

The Sick Children's Trust runs ten 'Homes from Home' across the country supporting families with seriously ill children in hospital. The charity relies entirely on voluntary donations and although the accommodation is free for families it costs the charity £30 to support a family for a night in one of its houses. **Abi Abdel-aal, Chestnut House Manager, says:**

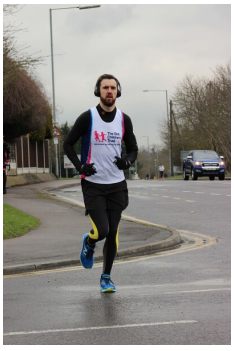
"It is terrifying for any parent when they have a seriously ill child in hospital and as a charity we hope to help as many families as possible during such difficult times. The Sick Children's Trust relies entirely on voluntary donations so it means everything to us when families we have supported go on to fundraise for us.

Media:















“The photos from Chris’ challenge are fantastic and show just how far he pushed himself to raise money. We can’t thank him enough. His donation raised enough to provide 75 nights of accommodation in a ‘Home from Home’. The fact that he and Laura continue to fundraise for us and hold bake sales means so much.”

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



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