Dad on fundraising mission to thank charity who helped family after twin baby boy became seriously unwell

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The father of a premature twin boy who became seriously ill at three days old has been raising money for The Sick Children's Trust as thanks for supporting his family whilst his son received lifesaving treatment in hospital.

Nick Smith, 35 from Bishop's Stortford in Hertfordshire, has raised over £630 for the charity by running the Hatfield Forest Half Marathon on 17 September and taking on a 12,000 ft skydive in Cambridge the following weekend.

Nick and his partner Harriet Banham, 34, faced every parent's worst nightmare when they were told there were serious complications with their twins during pregnancy and Harriet was diagnosed with twin to twin transfusion syndrome (TTTS). The couple were told that one twin, to be named Aubrey, was receiving more blood than the other, Rafferty, and it was unlikely he would survive.

Rafferty and Aubrey had to be delivered by emergency caesarean at 32 weeks, weighing a combined weight of 7lbs 2oz, and were immediately placed in the Special Care Baby Unit at Whipps Cross University Hospital. At three days old Rafferty became seriously ill and contracted the deadly bowel disease necrotising enterocolitis, which causes the tissues in the gut to become inflamed and die. He was rushed to The Royal London Hospital where doctors removed 30cm of his bowel during an emergency operation. And although Rafferty was able to go back to Whipps Cross Hospital and join his brother after several weeks, he continued to suffer from very sensitive bowels. At four months old, Rafferty's condition deteriorated and he was readmitted to The Royal London Hospital, where he remained for a further two and a half months. **Dad Nick says:**

"When Rafferty was readmitted to The Royal London Hospital it was really difficult for us because Harriet and Aubrey were back at home in Wanstead and I was sleeping on hospital chairs in the waiting room at night and then going to work in the daytime. Looking back I am not sure how we even coped.

"After a month of living in this awful situation, away from my partner and other baby, sick with fatigue, somebody mentioned a house that was run by The Sick Children's Trust where I might be able to stay. It was a total lifesaver and for the last month of Rafferty's stay in hospital we were given a room at Stevenson House.

"It was such an oasis of calm and normality and meant that we could be a family after such a long time apart. My partner and I had been like passing ships. I would come back from work to the hospital to be with Rafferty overnight only for her to leave after being with him during the day. I felt I wasn't able to bond with Aubrey and missed him terribly, plus our baby boys were not together. Stevenson House allowed us to heal as a family and as Rafferty slowly improved, we were even allowed to take him outside and stay at Stevenson House – the four of us. It was something we will never forget."

"The half marathon was really challenging because it was very muddy and slippy and I had to jump over ditches and try not to fall over, but the skydive was the real assault on the senses. I was very relieved when I got back down to earth and was reunited with my boys and Harriet!"

Rafferty and Aubery are now five years old and are both doing really well. Since their stay at Stevenson House, the family have been fundraising for The Sick Children's Trust over the past few years by taking part in the charity's Big Chocolate Tea campaign and earlier this year raised over £200 for the charity by holding a chocola-tea party. **Mum Harriet adds:**

"We have nothing but positive words for The Sick Children's Trust who were there for us in our most desperate time. Now the twins are older they understand what their dad is doing for the charity and we were all there cheering him on during the race. The twins couldn't quite believe it when they saw their dad jump out of a plane. Jospah, our 19 month old son, was so excited when he spotted his dad parachuting towards earth!"

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. Whilst the accommodation is provided free of charge, it costs the charity £30 per night to support a family. **Stevenson House manager, Alan Booth, says:**

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“It was so lovely when Nick and Harriet were able to take Rafferty out of hospital and bring him to Stevenson House. The time they spent with us as a family was so important for them and I am so glad we were able to support them when they needed it the most.

“We would like to say a huge thank you to Nick for his ambitious fundraising challenges – as a charity we rely on voluntary donations so we can continue to run our ten ‘Homes from Home’ across the country, supporting families with seriously ill children in hospital. Whatever Nick raises from the half marathon and skydive will make a huge difference to many families who need our support.”

To find out more about Nick’s fundraising challenges, please visit: https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/nickwins

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

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