Dad prepares to take on Manchester challenge to thank The Sick Children's Trust

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A doting Dad is lacing up his trainers and getting ready to run the Manchester 10k on Sunday 20 May to raise money for The Sick Children's Trust as thanks for supporting his family with free 'Home from Home' accommodation when his daughter was born seriously ill.

Tom Alloway, 31, from Selby, is on a fundraising mission to thank the charity that kept him and his partner, Stef, by their daughter's hospital bedside when she needed lifesaving treatment at Leeds General Infirmary (LGI).

Agnes was diagnosed with a congenital diaphragmatic hernia (CDH) at her 20 week scan. This meant that her diaphragm had failed to form correctly and this was causing her bowels and intestines to move up into her chest cavity, putting intense pressure on her heart and lungs and preventing them from growing properly. As a result it was decided that Agnes would be delivered at specialist paediatric hospital, LGI, miles away from the family's home, so the newborn baby could receive the lifesaving treatment she required.

When Agnes was born, she was immediately transferred to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) and underwent two major operations in the first four weeks of her life. Fortunately, during this traumatic time, Agnes' worried parents were given a room at Eckersley House, free 'Home from Home' accommodation run by The Sick Children's Trust, which meant they were never more than a few minutes from their precious daughter's hospital bedside. **Dad Tom, an Administrator at University of York, says:**

"Words can't describe how distraught we were to find out that something was wrong with Agnes. My dreams of having the perfect little family disappeared in an instant and were instead replaced with a sense of apprehension and anxiety. All we could do was hope that our baby was a fighter and would survive the lifesaving surgery she would need within weeks of being born.

"When Agnes was on NICU we were offered a room at Eckersley House and it was such a relief. Although Stef and I dreaded leaving her at the end of each day, we both knew that with a direct line from our bedroom at Eckersley House to NICU, we would know instantly if her condition changed and we could be by our baby's side within minutes. Having a 'Home from Home' also gave us a space to get away from the incessant beeping of machines, which at the time felt like torture. Eckersley House allowed us to fall into a sort of routine, where we could do everyday things, such as making a home cooked meal or taking a shower, things you'd normally take for granted. The house was such a safe haven for both Stef and I as we were exhausted from spending up to 18 hours a day on NICU with Agnes."

After being treated at LGI for over seven weeks, and battling her way through two major surgeries, Agnes' condition began to improve and she was allowed to go home for the first time. The baby girl, who is now six months old, has inspired her dad to take on the Manchester 10k challenge for The Sick Children's Trust. **Tom, who hopes to raise £1,000 for the charity, continues:**

"Stef and I both wanted to give something back to the charity that provided us with so much support when we needed it most – without The Sick Children's Trust, this incredibly tough time would've been even harder. This challenge is by far the biggest thing I will have ever done. Training started very slowly, but I've been surprised how quickly my body adapted. Although finding the time to fit in the longer runs is a real challenge, I am committed to completing the race and raising money for an amazing cause.

"I initially set a fundraising target of £300 and I'm thrilled to say that we've managed to exceed this amount already. I'm incredibly grateful for all the support from friends, family and the general public, who heard what I was doing and took the time to visit my fundraising page. I'm determined to make everyone proud, especially Agnes, and raise as much money as possible."

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. The charity relies entirely on voluntary donations and it costs £30 to support a family for one night. **Emily Corney, Regional Fundraising Officer at The Sick Children's Trust, says:**

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“Everyone at The Sick Children’s Trust is so pleased to hear that Agnes is now at home and doing well. Tom has done an amazing job to surpass his fundraising target, and I know he’ll make everyone proud. The money he raises will make a huge difference in supporting more families who need a ‘Home from Home’ when their child is seriously ill in hospital. We wish him the best of luck!”

To read more about Tom’s fundraising mission, please visit his fundraising page at: https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/tom-alloway

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

For further information about congenital diaphragmatic hernias, please visit: http://www.cdhuk.org.uk/

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