Durham parents go the extra mile after raising £2,400

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The thankful parents of a little boy who underwent two major heart surgeries before his first birthday are taking part in the Great North Run to raise funds for The Sick Children's Trust.

Debbie and Alec Berry, 32 from Willington, are hoping to raise further funds for the charity that provided them with free 'Home from Home' accommodation when their son, Joseph, was seriously ill at Freeman Hospital.

Last year, the couple raised over £2,000 by taking part in one of the year's most anticipated races, however this time last year their baby was awaiting life-saving heart surgery. Joseph was born with a condition where four different problems with his heart all occurred together - Tetralogy of Fallot. After spending the majority of the first year of his life in hospital, Joseph was allowed to go home. Joseph, now 18 months old, is doing really well although he will need another intervention soon.

Mum Debbie says: "2015 was a very difficult year for us as a family. It was incredibly worrying, stressful and emotional – but we have got through it together.

"The day I noticed Joseph wasn't his usual self our lives were turned upside down, we felt lost and panicked. We spent months at Freeman Hospital, and it was very hard emotionally. Some days I felt like a robot, it was hard just putting one foot in front of the other as I was sick with worry.

"Joseph has undergone a number of treatments including major surgeries. I made a promise to him that I would not go home without him and thanks to Scott House I didn't have to as they gave us a 'Home from Home', so we could be right by Joseph's bedside, never leaving him. I will always be eternally grateful for that.

"This is why Alec and I are doing the Great North Run for The Sick Children's Trust once again. We raised over £2,000 for the charity but nothing will be enough to thank them for giving us a place so close to Joseph, so we could be there to care for him, every step of the way."

Joseph a strong, funny and cheeky little toddler. His last operation was in January since coming home Debbie has started writing a blog – Heart Mummy - to help other families who may be going through a similar experience. **She continues**:

"Joseph is doing amazingly well and we feel completely blessed to have him with us at home and thriving. Joseph is completely unaware that he has a heart condition and we love that. His heart condition does not define him as a person. We recognise that we are very lucky. We hear stories regularly of families that have not been as fortunate as us.

"As I mentioned, 2015 was very, very difficult and his last procedure in January was the straw that broke me. I have subsequently been suffering from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Both of which are not uncommon for parents with very sick children. "Running has been a tool that I can use daily to help me overcome these illnesses. Having the Great North Run as a deadline has been a massive motivator. I have gone from struggling to face the day to now running, working, blogging and helping other mums with similar problems. Running has been such a help that I have set myself the biggest challenge yet - the Edinburgh marathon in March 2017."

The Sick Children's Trust's Scott House will be celebrating its second anniversary since opening this October and has supported hundreds of families with seriously ill children at Freeman Hospital. Each family receives a private en-suite bedroom and has access to a communal kitchen, living room and laundry facilities.

Scott House Manager Andrew Leadbitter says: "After raising £2,400 last year for The Sick Children's Trust we are absolutely over the moon that Debbie and Alec have decided to fundraise for us again.

"Being able to help families like Joseph's is only made possible by the generous people who fundraise for us and donate. Although our 'Homes from Home' are free for families, it costs the charity around £30 to support a family for one night. The Sick Children's Trust is completely reliant on donations."

Alec and Debbie are two out of 58 people who have chosen to raise money for The Sick Children's Trust by running the Great North Run. If you would like to support them, please visit:

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https://www.justgiving.com/Debbie-Berry4

For further information on Debbie’s Blog, please visit: https://heartmummyblog.wordpress.com/

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