Family friend takes on immense 400-mile cycle challenge to say thank you to charity

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An Essex man is cycling 400 miles to raise money for The Sick Children's Trust as thanks for supporting his friends when their three year old daughter almost died after contracting a deadly bacterial infection and pneumonia last year.

Steve will cycle 400 miles over three challenging rides to celebrate his friends' daughter Mary's brave fight against two life-threatening illness.

His close friends, John and Sarah, were left terrified when their healthy little girl became critically ill over the space of a weekend last July. Mary was rushed into the paediatric ward at Colchester Hospital after going into septic shock. Nurses and consultants fought to stabilise her with antibiotics, fluids and oxygen on the high dependency ward, but Mary's condition soon deteriorated. She was put into an induced coma and rushed for specialist intensive care at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge for lifesaving treatment.

After 48 hours with no sleep, John and Sarah were told that The Sick Children's Trust was able to give them somewhere to stay, just minutes from their daughter's hospital bedside. For the six weeks while Mary was in Addenbrooke's Hospital, John and Sarah were supported by the charity's free 'Home from Home' accommodation, Acorn House. **Steve, who will be cycling for The Sick Children's Trust in Mary's honour, says:**

"Mary had just turned three and was a happy and healthy child who was rarely unwell. It was devastating to hear from John that she was fighting for her life in Addenbrooke's Hospital. I couldn't believe it.

"He told me they were staying just a few minutes from Mary's side at Acorn House, a free 'Home from Home' run by a charity called The Sick Children's Trust. I was so impressed to hear how homely and welcoming Acorn House was and how close it was to where Mary was being treated. John told me they were even able to switch off their phones at night because there was a landline in their room and staff would call them directly from the ward if there were any changes in Mary's condition. Mary was only three when she was struck by this life-changing illness – she had to have the fingertips on one of her hands removed.

"I took up cycling three years ago when I decided to fundraise for North London Hospice who had cared for my late mother just before she passed away. Since then, I have done other cycle events in her memory and with the help of friends and family raised nearly £7,000 for causes close to my heart, namely Cancer Research UK, Farleigh Hospice, WellChild and Scope. This year I am dedicating my efforts to Mary, who is an incredible child to have fought her way back from the edge. Mary and her parents are extremely determined and resilient, and with the support of their family and friends, Mary continues to makes progress daily."

The Sick Children's Trust runs ten 'Homes from Home' across the country, giving families with seriously ill children in hospital free accommodation. It costs the charity £30 to support a family for one night in a 'Home from Home'. **Acorn House Assistant Manager, Hayley Peckham, says:**

"Mary is a little miracle. When I met John and Sarah they were not sure whether Mary would make a full recovery, she wasn't even expected to survive the journey from Colchester to Cambridge. To see her now is just incredible.

"It's wonderful to hear that Steve has decided to undertake these challenges for The Sick Children's Trust. The money that Steve raises will make a huge difference, helping families who have a seriously ill child in hospital and need a 'Home from Home'."

Steve will be cycling 110 miles during Tour de Essex on 28 May, 160 miles during Coast to Coast in Yorkshire on 9 / 10 June, and then the remaining 130 miles in an unsupported ride on 24 / 25 June, hopefully accompanied by his young children for the final part of the 130 miles.

To read more about Mary's journey and Steve's fundraising efforts please visit:

https://mydonate.bt.com/fundraisers/cyclingformary

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