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The parents of a baby girl, who underwent lifesaving surgery at a hospital miles away from home, when she was just a few hours old, are on a fundraising mission to raise money for The Sick Children's Trust, the charity which supported them with free 'Home from Home' accommodation.

Daisy Baldwin, 25, and Will Wakefield, 26, from Leigh-on-Sea, are organising a fundraiser at Barru Bar and Kitchen on Saturday 10 February to thank the charity for keeping them by their daughter's hospital bedside when she required major surgery at The Royal London Children's Hospital.

When Daisy and Will went for their 12 week scan they were devastated to find out there was something wrong with their baby, Nelly. Doctors at Southend University Hospital told the worried parents that Nelly had developed a condition known as gastroschisis, a developmental defect where the abdominal wall does not develop completely so the intestines develop outside of the body. They were sent to King's College Hospital in London for further tests and Nelly was closely monitored over the months that followed. **Mum, Daisy, who works for global consulting firm North Highland, says:**

"It was devastating to find out that there was something wrong with Nelly and so worrying to know that she would need an operation as soon as she was born. But the doctors reassured Will and me that there were no other complications and that Nelly would be delivered at King's College Hospital so she could receive the necessary care.

"However, Nelly decided she wanted to come early and at 34 weeks my waters broke without me realising. By the time we arrived at my local hospital in Southend there was no choice but to deliver her there. Nelly was born by caesarean on 5 August in the middle of the night and she was only the second baby in over 20 years that the midwife had seen with gastroschisis.

"After she was born, the doctors covered her intestines in cling film to protect them and plans were made to get her transferred urgently to King's College Hospital. But because Nelly's arrival was a surprise, there were no cots free so she was rushed to The Royal London Hospital. It was all very quick, but what I remember mostly was Will and I comforting each other as we were just so upset that we hadn't even held our new baby because she was so seriously ill."

"Within 12 hours of being born, thanks to the amazing team at The Royal London Hospital, Nelly's intestines were put back inside her body and she was placed on the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). The hospital was so far from our home and the thought of being separated from Nelly during a huge time of uncertainty was very scary, but the wonderful nurses on NICU put us in touch with The Sick Children's Trust. The charity runs a place called Stevenson House which was located just minutes from Nelly's bedside and we were told we could have a room there."

The Sick Children's Trust runs ten 'Homes from Home' across the country, supporting families like Nelly's with free accommodation whilst their child is being treated in hospital. **Daisy continues:**

"Stevenson House was nothing short of amazing. With a direct line to the ward in our room we were just a phone call away from Nelly at all times and could be by her side in minutes if needed. It also gave us a sense of normality when we needed to rest, sleep or eat. This extraordinary place also provided a feeling of unity between families who had been thrown together in such unfortunate circumstances.

"As first time parents, the experience of having our baby in hospital was a lot to deal with and during some very painful and emotional times with our brave little Nelly, we were always grateful for the support provided by The Sick Children's Trust. Stevenson House made a massive difference to us – it's almost impossible to find the words to express our thanks and gratitude to all the staff that supported us during our stay. We are truly thankful and Stevenson House will always hold a special place in our hearts."

Over the weeks that followed, Nelly started to feed and recover from her lifesaving operation and all the while her parents were by her side because of Stevenson House. They stayed at Stevenson House for

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six weeks until Nelly was transferred back to the special care baby unit at Southend Hospital and to their joy, she was discharged home the following day. Nelly is now thriving and to celebrate her speedy recovery and thank The Sick Children's Trust, next month her parents will hold a fundraiser in aid of the charity.

The couple have already raised over £2000 but hope to raise more and are selling tickets at £7 each. **Daisy, who has appealed to local businesses for donations towards a charity raffle, says:**

"We have a brilliant local DJ, Dan Barnes, playing all evening and my stepdad's company, Windowfix in Leigh-on-sea, are generously providing food on the night. We have also had some pretty good contributions for the raffle, including a signed photograph of footballer Ronaldo, afternoon tea at a local restaurant and a voucher from a local hairdressing salon. We will also have some donation buckets to collect for The Sick Children's Trust on the night. And Nelly will of course make a star appearance. I am really hoping we will raise a lot more money for the charity that looked after Will and me when we needed it most."

The Sick Children's Trust relies entirely on voluntary donations and it costs the charity £30 to support a family for one night. **Irma Cambron, Assistant House Manager at Stevenson House, says:**

"It was lovely to see Daisy and Will recently when Nelly had an appointment at The Royal London Hospital. They all looked so well and Daisy told me about their plans for the fundraiser. It is just so important for parents to have the support of the charity when they are going through such a hard time with a seriously ill child.

"Fortunately Nelly has now been given the all clear, but their fundraising efforts will help us to support other families who have a seriously ill child in hospital. I hope the fundraiser goes really well, and I'd like to thank Nelly's family for spreading the word about the vital work The Sick Children's Trust carries out."

To support Nelly's family on their fundraising mission, please visit the Just Giving page: https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/daisy-baldwin1

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

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