Family support charity's Christmas appeal as thanks for giving them a 'Home from Home'

Tuesday 19 December, 2017

The family of a little boy who has spent his life in and out of hospital have pledged to support The Sick Children's Trust's Christmas appeal as thanks for giving them free 'Home from Home' accommodation.

Susan and Owen Morris, from Wixams, have been supported by The Sick Children's Trust on five occasions when their youngest son, Alexander, was born six weeks premature with several rare medical complications. Alexander, now 20 months old, has had to undergo four major surgeries in specialist hospitals, The Rosie Hospital and Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge and Great Ormond Street (GOSH) since being born. During this time The Sick Children's Trust has supported Alexander's parents and older brother Ethan with free 'Home from Home' accommodation just minutes from his hospital bedside.

As thanks to the charity for its support, Alexander's family have donated £210 to The Sick Children's Trust Christmas appeal which aims to raise £13,140 to keep its ten 'Homes from Home' running, supporting families with critically ill children over the festive period. **Mum Susan, 37, says:**

"It's a year since we have used one of The Sick Children's Trust's 'Homes from Home'. 2016 was a very trying year for us as a family as I spent most of it in hospital with my son Alex and travelling back and forth each day to see him as he underwent lifesaving treatment in hospitals far away from home. But The Sick Children's Trust was there to support us when times got really bad and we used three of their 'Homes from Home' several times last year. It was lovely to be able to have a place to stay close to Alex, where I could have a hot cooked meal, a comfortable night's sleep and know that I was only five minutes away from him if anything was to happen. The staff were really friendly and very supportive to us each time we returned to the house.

"Alexander was born with several rare medical complications including being unable to swallow as his oesophagus was not joined to his stomach. He also had several issues with his heart and had an extremely narrow trachea which only affects around 1 in 8 million children.

"Soon after birth, Alex and I were transferred from Bedford Hospital to The Rosie Hospital in Cambridge. I still needed hospital care in The Rosie, but my husband, Owen, stayed at Chestnut House whilst they performed emergency surgery on Alex. He was extremely poorly during and after surgery but my husband was able to be with us whilst we both recovered from surgery thanks to Chestnut House."

A few months later Alex was transferred to GOSH where he had further surgery on his heart, oesophagus, and trachea. Once again, the family faced a stressful time many miles away from home.

Susan continues: "It was extremely difficult travelling every day from Bedford to London whilst Alex was so poorly, but we found out that a room had become available at Rainbow House – also run by The Sick Children's Trust.

"This meant once again we could have a 'Home from Home' whilst Alex had his most complicated and life-threatening surgery. After months of travelling to and from London each day, it was such a relief to only have a short walk home after a long day in the hospital and be able to spend more time together with my family. Having time to walk home, cook a meal together and watch some TV at the end of a very stressful day on intensive care kept us going for the long journey we still had ahead of us.

"It's important to realise the stress that siblings feel when their brother/sister is poorly in hospital, it's a confusing and difficult time for them too. My eldest son Ethan loved the fact we all stayed together at Rainbow House, he had toys he could play with and could play with other children staying at the house. It gave us all a sense of normality when everything else was in chaos for us."

Unfortunately, this time last year, Alex caught a virus and stopped breathing whilst being treated at Addenbrooke's Hospital and needed additional care on the paediatric intensive care unit. He stayed there for ten days before being well enough to go back to a normal ward (and managed to get home just before Christmas!). Once again, the family were give free 'Home from Home' accommodation at Acorn House.

Susan adds: "A year on I am pleased to say Alex is much more stable and whilst we still regularly need

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to go into hospital for treatment and procedures at GOSH we will always be grateful for the support we have received from The Sick Children's Trust. That's why we will be donating to their 'Home from Home' appeal this Christmas so that other families can benefit from the amazing work they do across the country, keeping families together."

The Sick Children's Trust is a national charity which supports around 4,000 families every year. The charity relies entirely on voluntary donations to keep its ten 'Homes from Home' running, providing vital support to families with children undergoing lifesaving treatment in hospital. This Christmas it expects that every room in every house will be full with families, caring for some of the UK's sickest children. The Christmas appeal aims to raise £13,140, enough to run its ten 'Homes from Home', providing essential emotional and practical support to families in need. **Jane Featherstone, Chief Executive at The Sick Children's Trust says:**

"No child should wake up on Christmas morning without their family around them. But this Christmas, many families with a critically ill child in a specialist hospital will face a long journey to be at their child's side.

"A donation of £30 will give a family a place to stay in one of our 'Homes from Home', just moments from their sick child. It costs The Sick Children's Trust £13,140 to run our ten 'Homes from Home' across the country over the Christmas period, keeping families together at one of the most important times of the year. Your donation can make this possible."

To keep a family together this Christmas, please visit: https://www.justgiving.com/campaigns/charity/sickchildrenstrust/alliwantforxmas.

To watch the Christmas appeal film, visit: https://youtu.be/qpgKkZuPWmc.

For more information on The Sick Children's Trust and for other ways to donate, please visit http://www.sickchildrenstrust.org/Donate/.

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