Father’s legacy helps keep 11,000 families with seriously ill children in hospital together

Tuesday 18 September, 2018

The son of a local Yorkshire businessman who founded Eckersley House, a ‘Home from Home’ at Leeds Children’s Hospital run by The Sick Children’s Trust, is encouraging the community to join in with celebrating the house supporting over 11,000 families for 25 years.

Mark Eckersley, 60, from Dore, Sheffield, is the son of Robert ‘Bob’ Eckersley, who passed away from cancer and in his legacy, Bob wanted to ensure that families with seriously ill children undergoing hospital treatment far away from home didn’t have to leave their loved one’s hospital bedside. Tragically, he experienced these difficulties when his eldest son, Guy, passed away at just 12 years old, having spent a prolonged period of time in hospital. Years later, Bob’s stepson, Simon, was admitted to Leeds for life-saving treatment which meant he and his family had to travel miles to be with him. As a result, Eckersley House was founded by Bob’s family in his name following his passing.

The ‘Home from Home’ – which was originally located at St James’s University Hospital but has been based at Leeds General Infirmary since 2010 – supports families with seriously ill children who require specialist treatment in Leeds. This year, The Sick Children’s Trust celebrates 25 years of supporting families at Eckersley House. Mark, who, along with his wife, Mie, continues to be involved with Eckersley House, says:
“Eckersley House has grown and prospered since it first opened, and we hope it will continue to for many more years to come. Before my father died, he made it very clear that in his legacy he wanted a place to be developed that would relieve the stress and worries, which he knew came with having a seriously ill child in hospital.

“Eckersley House has carried out my father’s wishes – to have an impact on sick children’s lives by giving parents and families the ability to stay close to their loved ones. I’ve met families who sleep on the floor next to their child’s hospital bedside, or on a chair in a waiting room, and have dealt with this situation for many months and travelled hundreds of miles to be with their child every day. Eckersley House means they don’t have to. Parents have a space away from the wards where there’s a comforting, relaxed atmosphere in a safe environment just minutes from their child’s bedside, as well as people they can talk to, a shoulder to cry on or just someone to enjoy a cup of tea with.”

Eckersley House has 22 family bedrooms, eight bathrooms, three fully equipped kitchens and communal areas, three playrooms, three shared living rooms and laundry facilities. It also has a self-contained flat for when a child is recovering from a liver transplant and within all rooms there is a direct telephone line to the ward. Although the accommodation is provided free to families, The Sick Children’s Trust relies entirely on voluntary donations to support around 4,000 families across its ‘Homes from Home’ every year. Mark continues:

“Our children are ten and eight now and are really starting to understand what Eckersley House is and why this was so important to their grandfather – they’ve even been fundraising at school! As a family, we are very dedicated to Eckersley House. We will always be eternally grateful to The Sick Children’s Trust for running Eckersley House over the last 25 years and supporting over 11,000 families with children undergoing lifesaving treatment at Leeds Children’s Hospital.

“For many families who find themselves at Eckersley House, they leave with a piece of it in their hearts because of what it has done for them. The house doesn’t just keep them close to their loved ones and alleviate financial pressures, but the families who stay there receive emotional and practical support from an empathetic and highly trained team of people, who have dedicated their lives to a cause that means a family can focus completely on their sick child.

“We hope Eckersley House will go on to support many more families in the years to come. The last 25 years have had a huge impact on so many families, who would’ve ended up sleeping in a chair or on the floor beside their loved ones, or travelling miles upon miles to be with them every single day.”

The Sick Children’s Trust runs ten ‘Homes from Home’ across the country, three of which are based in Yorkshire. Alongside Eckersley House, the charity has two ‘Homes from Home’ supporting families at Sheffield Children’s Hospital – Treetop and Magnolia Houses. Jane McHale, Eckersley House Manager, says:

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“From everyone at The Sick Children’s Trust and on behalf of all the families we support, we’d like to say a huge thank you to all of Bob’s family for founding Eckersley House. Over the years, Eckersley House has been there for thousands of families whose lives get thrown into complete turmoil when their child is diagnosed with a life-threatening illness or involved in a serious accident, and we hope it will continue to be there for even more families in the coming years.”

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

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