Having The Sick Children's Trust's Acorn House made a horrible time more bearable – it stopped us from drowning.

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When my wife Tessa had our daughter, the birth went smoothly. So when we found out we were pregnant with our son, Elijah, we decided to opt for a home birth. We thought it would be low risk to have our second child at home. But what started out as a good labour turned into an emergency.

Elijah had shoulder dystocia which meant Tessa's pelvis and his shoulder clashed so he struggled to come out. With the support and intervention from our midwife, eventually Elijah made it out, but he wasn't breathing. For four and a half minutes the world stood still until he finally took his first breath. I was terrified he wouldn't make it. There are no words to describe what I felt in those minutes, it was so scary.

Despite his traumatic entrance into the world, for the first six weeks Elijah was a happy, little boy, just like any other new-born. But then we had a strange day. We spent this particular Saturday in our friends' garden at a birthday party, so I had Elijah in the baby carrier. Tessa and I had both commented that he was asleep for most of the day and barely murmured, then that evening he wouldn't stop crying and his temperature was getting higher and higher.

Tessa and I considered taking him straight to A&E, but at this point we thought it may just be a cold and didn't want to cause a fuss, so we monitored him at home for a while. A couple of hours passed and we still couldn't settle him, so we called my Mum, Linda, who is a nurse and suggested that we should take him to A&E. In the early hours of the morning Tessa took Elijah and drove to Colchester hospital while I stayed at home with our daughter.

An hour later, I got a distressed call from Tessa who was extremely upset and scared. She said that the hospital had rushed Elijah into resuscitation and were trying desperately to take blood from him and get a line into him to give him fluids and antibiotics. The doctors weren't able to get a needle into Elijah's veins as they were collapsing. This meant they had to drill a hole into his bones as another way to get fluid into his little body.

We only owned one car as a family, which Tessa had driven to the hospital, so I had to call my Mother-in-Law who drove my daughter and I to see them. As soon as we walked into A&E I could hear my baby boy's cry. You don't realise until you hear it just how much you can recognise your own child's cry. I'll never forget that moment I walked in and saw Elijah lying in a bed with four nurses around him and Tessa holding his little hand. We were told he would need specialist care at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge as they thought he might have a stomach infection or gastro-intestinal blockage.

Tessa went with Elijah in the ambulance while our daughter went home with my Mother-in-Law. I took our car and quickly drove home, grabbing whatever clothes and belongings I could before driving to Cambridge. I had no idea how long Elijah would be in hospital so I packed a sleeping bag too – just in case I needed to sleep in the car. And so when I pulled into the hospital's car park, I chose a spot close to the wall where it might be possible to catch five minutes' sleep.

We both felt terrified and helpless, but a lovely, reassuring nurse met us and took one worry away. Thankfully I didn't have to sleep in the car. We had been given a bedroom at a place called Acorn House – free 'Home from Home' accommodation located in the hospital grounds and run by a charity called The Sick Children's Trust. Acorn House was going to be our home for as long as Elijah was being treated at Addenbrooke's Hospital. This was a huge relief as home was nearly an hour and a half away.

I walked over to find out where it was. I was greeted by friendly and warm faces who showed me around the house. It was amazing - I wasn't expecting to see what I saw. We had our own private room where we could sleep and recover after long hours spent on the ward. There was a kitchen where we could cook homemade meals and a playroom for when our daughter came to visit.

During his time at Addenbrooke's Hospital, it wasn't possible to sleep next to Elijah on the intensive care ward as the medical staff needed complete access to him, so Tessa and I took it in turns to sleep and freshen up at Acorn House. I sat next to Elijah on the ward during the night and slept in the morning, whereas Tessa sat with Elijah during the day and slept at night. The team at Acorn House couldn't have been more helpful, they were always asking how Elijah was and offered their help and support. Having

The Sick Children's Trust's Acorn House made a horrible time more bearable – it stopped us from drowning. Because of Acorn House we didn't feel like we were abandoning our little boy and we could focus all of our attention on helping him to get better. It also meant we could spend some much-needed time with our daughter who came to visit and very much enjoyed all the toys in the playroom. She was only two years-old at the time and was wondering what had happened to mummy and daddy - it was horrible. Being able to spend time with her in such a warm, friendly place meant that she felt reassured when she came to see us.

We stayed at Acorn House for five nights whilst Elijah recovered and we will be forever grateful to The Sick Children's Trust. Elijah was eventually diagnosed with viral meningitis which had been caused by the parechovirus. And nearly a year on from those horrific few weeks, Elijah is doing so well and we're very proud of our little boy!

To say thank you to The Sick Children's Trust for supporting my family when our whole world had been turned upside down, I decided to run the Royal Parks Half Marathon to fundraise for them and my dad and cousin also completed the run. It was a lovely day and the atmosphere was fantastic – we managed to get my dad over the line in less than two hours which we were really pleased about. I hope I made Elijah proud, and my fundraising will ensure other families can stay close to their sick child's hospital bedside.

Antony,
Dad to Elijah.

Company Contact: