# Little girl survives heart surgery to attend school this September

**Tuesday 22 August, 2017**

A little girl who underwent heart surgery at just eight weeks old is ready and raring to start school for the first time this September.

At 24 weeks pregnant, Mum Suzanne Halfyard was diagnosed with early onset severe pre-eclampsia and after two and a half weeks was rushed to The Royal London Hospital. Within hours Suzanne had an emergency caesarean and gave birth to her daughter Amelia who weighed just 800g, and was diagnosed with a hole in her heart which led to serious health complications. For four months, Amelia needed specialist treatment at The Royal London Hospital but after failing to respond to medication she was transferred to St Thomas' Hospital, where she underwent lifesaving surgery to close the hole in her heart.

During her time in The Royal London Hospital, parents Suzanne and Mark were supported by The Sick Children's Trust's Stevenson House, one of the charity's ten 'Homes from Home' across the country. **Mum Suzanne says:**

"The first week after Amelia was born was a really frustrating time for our family. Because of my caesarean, I wasn't able to drive – so every day I would have to find someone to pick me up from our home in Walthamstow, drive across London to The Royal London Hospital, and then organise when and where to be picked up. Visiting my own daughter in hospital had become the hardest thing in the world.

"So when I was given a set of keys to Stevenson House I was so relieved – it was absolutely great. Staying at Stevenson for the ten weeks Amelia was in The Royal London Hospital gave me and Mark the independence to be the parents we wanted to be. Mark was still working in London so not only was it much easier for him to travel back and forth, but I also had the comfort of knowing that at all times I was only a few minutes' walk from Amelia's bedside and could be with her whenever she needed me. The Sick Children's Trust kept our family together during one of our most difficult times."

Four months after her birth and a month after her scheduled due date, Amelia was allowed to return home and Suzanne and Mark moved to Loughton to be with Amelia's grandparents. Amelia, however, continued to suffer from breathing difficulties and for the next 15 months was in and out of hospital four times before eventually being transferred to the paediatric intensive care unit (PICU) at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge – 50 miles away from home. Suzanne and Mark were once again offered accommodation by The Sick Children's Trust at the charity's Acorn House. **Acorn House Manager, Abigail Abdel-aal adds:**

"Acorn House is one of two 'Homes from Home' at in Cambridge and supports families who come from far and wide to access the hospital's specialist paediatric services. It was a pleasure knowing that we could help Suzanne and Mark while Amelia was being treated so far from home. After months of being in and out of hospital and moving around while Amelia was seriously ill we know it was a real relief for the family that they had their own place to stay, a 'Home from Home' where they could spend their time actually looking after their daughter, and not driving to and from hospital.

"It's so lovely to hear that Amelia's doing well now, we're sure that she'll thrive at her new school and we wish her the best of luck on her first day!"

Amelia came off oxygen in January 2014 and has suffered from no lasting or major illnesses as a result of premature birth and is now looking forward to putting on her school uniform for the first time. **Suzanne continues:**

"Amelia has grown up to be a lovely, lively little girl, always running about climbing things or dancing around. She's still quite small for her age, but she definitely makes up for that in personality!

"I don't think the transition to school will be too difficult for Amelia. A few of her cousins are in the years above as well so there'll be a few familiar faces in the playground at least, and when she visited her new class the other day she absolutely adored it.

"She's already been attending pre-school – I remember on her first day there I was told by one of the teachers that parents tend to get a bit tearful the first time they drop their kids off. I was so used to

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leaving Amelia every night at the hospital, so actually leaving her for a couple of hours there knowing that she was going to enjoy herself simply made me incredibly happy.

“I know primary school will be a big change for Amelia, but Mark and I are both teachers and we’ll be there to support her every step of the way.”

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

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