Mum set to take on 91 mile walk with her six month old baby to thank The Sick Children's Trust

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A grateful mum is taking on a 91 mile walking challenge this month to raise money for The Sick Children's Trust as thanks for supporting her family with free 'Home from Home' accommodation when her daughter was born seriously ill.

Kelly Phizacklea, 29, from Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, will complete the 91 mile walk throughout the month of January, carrying her baby, Laurel, to represent the 13 weeks that the little girl spent on the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). Kelly is now on a fundraising mission to thank The Sick Children's Trust for its support. The charity, which runs free 'Home from Home' accommodation supported Kelly and husband, Sean, during their daughters battle for survival at The Rosie Hospital, far away from the family's home.

Laurel was diagnosed with exomphalos at her 12 week scan which meant that her abdomen had not closed properly, causing her liver, stomach and bowel to remain outside her body. This was also diagnosed alongside OEIS complex, an extremely rare condition occurring in only one in 400,000 births. As a result it was decided that Laurel would be delivered by caesarean at the specialist hospital in Cambridge miles away from the family's home, so that the newborn baby could receive the lifesaving treatment she required. When Laurel was born, she was immediately transferred to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). Fortunately, during this traumatic time, Laurel's worried parents were given a room at Chestnut House, free 'Home from Home' accommodation run by The Sick Children's Trust, which meant they were never more than a few minutes from their precious daughter's incubator. **Each mile Kelly walks represents a day her daughter was in hospital. She says:**

"As soon as Laurel's condition was diagnosed Sean and I were on edge. For the remainder of the pregnancy we were trying to prepare ourselves for every possible situation we could be faced with when our daughter was born. All we could do was pray that our baby was a fighter and would be able to defy the odds that the doctors had stacked against her.

"After Laurel was born we were offered a room at Chestnut House, run by The Sick Children's Trust. My husband gratefully moved in straight away and I joined him in the free accommodation as soon as I was discharged. It was such a relief. Our room was just a stone's throw away from the ward meaning that we could go see Laurel whenever we wanted, even if it was just to go and sit next to her incubator at two in the morning. Knowing that I was able to see her, day or night, gave me the peace of mind I so desperately needed. Through the ups and downs of Laurel's recovery, Chestnut House allowed us to be there every step of the way. We could be the family we were supposed to be, even if we were still in hospital."

After being treated on NICU at The Rosie Hospital for 13 weeks, Laurel's condition began to improve and she was allowed to go home for the first time. The baby girl, who is now six months old, has inspired her mum to take on the 91 mile challenge for The Sick Children's Trust. **Kelly, who hopes to raise over £800 the children's charity, continues:**

"I really wanted to give something back to The Sick Children's Trust as without its support, this incredibly tough time would've been made a millions times tougher. The challenge will be hard for me because I'm not really an active person but there is no way I'm going to quit because it's for such an amazing cause. We're going to be walking one mile for each day Laurel spent in NICU – that's 91 miles in total! Laurel will be carried in her sling on my front so if I'm ever lacking motivation I can just look down at her and remember the reason why I'm doing it.

"My friends and family have offered to take on parts of the challenge with me which I'm so grateful for and we will all be wearing The Sick Children's Trust's t-shirts with pride! January is also exomphalos awareness month so it seems like the perfect time to take it on."

The Sick Children's Trust runs ten 'Homes from Home' across the country, giving families with seriously ill children free accommodation just minutes from their child's hospital bedside. The charity relies entirely on voluntary donations and it costs £30 to support a family for one night. **Chestnut House Manager, Abi Abdel-aal, says:**

"I think that Kelly is so brave for taking on this challenge, and her commitment to raise money and

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awareness for the charity is inspirational. The money raised will help so many families who find themselves miles away from home when their child need lifesaving treatment in hospital. We will be following her progress closely and can't wait to see how the challenge goes. Good luck Kelly and Laurel!"

To sponsor Kelly and Laurel, please visit https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/kellyandlaurel

To follow the family's journey, you can follow 'Eggs journey…Bump and beyond' on Facebook.

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

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