Mum training hard for first half marathon to thank charity who helped her family

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Media:













A local mum is running the Royal Parks Half Marathon on 14 October to raise money and awareness for The Sick Children's Trust, a charity which supported her when her daughter required lifesaving treatment in a hospital far away from home.

Paula Hunter, 39, from Brightlingsea, was over the moon when she discovered she was expecting a baby. Despite an enjoyable pregnancy, Paula endured a four day long labour during which it was discovered that her daughter, Lily, had inhaled meconium (her own faeces). When inhaled, meconium causes a baby's airways to become blocked and can cause fatality. As soon as she was born, floppy and unresponsive, doctors at Colchester General Infirmary rushed the newborn up to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) where they tried to clear her airways. However, Lily did not respond well and the decision was made to transfer the struggling baby to The Rosie Hospital in Cambridge, an hour and a half from the Hunters' home. **Mum, Paula, who is taking on the iconic 13.1 mile challenge across central London alongside her sister-in-law, Bev Hunter, says:**

"I only saw Lily for a second after she was delivered because I had to go through recovery myself following such a difficult labour. Four hours later I was shown photos of my daughter by the midwife, but neither my husband Neil nor I realised the severity of her condition at that point. When I was finally able to visit her on NICU, I was distraught to see my baby covered in wires and hooked up to so many monitors. We were told she needed to be sent to Cambridge for lifesaving treatment. But I wasn't ready to be discharged yet which meant my baby would have to travel there without me. I was heartbroken.

"Fortunately I was discharged later on that evening and Neil and I raced to be with Lily. One of the nurses in Colchester had told us about The Sick Children's Trust in advance and explained that the charity ran free 'Home from Home' accommodation at The Rosie Hospital in Cambridge. She said they might have room for us which was just minutes from Lily's side.

"That first night I was admitted to the hospital and Neil slept beside my hospital bed, but the next morning we were greeted by Abi, from The Sick Children's Trust. She offered us a room in Chestnut House, located just below NICU where Lily was being treated. Abi explained that the charity would support us, totally free of charge, keeping us right there next to our poorly baby. At such a traumatic time in our lives, this was a godsend."

After six days on NICU, Lily's recovery vastly improved. Her parents were told the medical team had never witnessed such a miraculous turnaround; on arrival Lily had been the sickest baby on the ward. **Mum, Paula, continues:**

"Watching Lily fight for her life every day is something we will never forget, but having a room in Chestnut House made it possible for us to be there with our daughter, joining her in her fight. Having a 'Home from Home' made all the difference to Neil and I. There were times in the middle of the night when I couldn't sleep and was desperately anxious. But I was able to visit Lily on the ward because we were within walking distance of her side."

Lily, who turned two years old in May, is now doing really well. To thank The Sick Children's Trust for keeping her by her daughter's hospital bedside, Paula hopes to raise £700 for the charity. She continues:

"I have wanted to raise money to say thank you to The Sick Children's Trust ever since they supported my family and now I finally feel ready. Before Lily was conceived I had registered to run my first ever half marathon, but had to stop training early on in my pregnancy. The Royal Parks Half Marathon seems like a perfect way to resume the challenge and at the same time raise both money and awareness for a charity close to all our hearts. Bev and I are training hard together and we're hoping to complete it in two hours. Our target is £700, but we really hope to smash this figure and get to £1,000"

The Sick Children's Trust runs ten 'Homes from Home' across the country supporting around 4,000 families with seriously ill children in hospital every year. The charity relies entirely on voluntary donations and although the accommodation is free for families it costs the charity £30 to support a family for a night in one of its houses. **Abi Abdel-aal, Chestnut House Manager, says:**

“It is terrifying for any parent when they have a seriously ill child in hospital and as a charity we hope to help as many families as possible during such difficult times. The Sick Children’s Trust relies entirely on voluntary donations so it means everything to us when families we have supported go on to fundraise for the charity.

“I remember how distraught Paula and Neil were when I first met them on the ward and then showed them around Chestnut House. Lily made a very quick recovery, but it was still touch and go those first few days, which was frightening for her parents. We are so grateful to Paula and Bev for taking on the challenge and wish them the best of luck!"

To get behind The Sick Children’s Trust and sponsor Paula visit her Just Giving site https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/paula-hunter4

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

About The Sick Children’s Trust

The Sick Children’s Trust is working to a future where every family with a seriously ill child in hospital will be able to stay together, just minutes from their child’s bed during their treatment.

We believe keeping families together significantly improves the recovery of seriously ill children. We provide free, high-quality ‘Home from Home’ accommodation, as well as emotional and practical support, to families with sick children in hospital in the UK.

The Sick Children’s Trust **was founded in 1982 by two paediatric specialists Dr Jon Pritchard and Professor James Malpas.** Today we have ten ‘Homes from Home’ at major hospitals around the country where families can stay free of charge, for as long as they need whilst their child is undergoing treatment.

We support around 4,000 families every year, and there is a growing demand for our ‘Homes from Home’ as children must increasingly travel long distances to get the specialist treatment they need. www.sickchildrenstrust.org





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