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

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A mum, who was supported by The Sick Children's Trust when her 12 week old baby became seriously ill, is running the ASICS Greater Manchester Marathon on 8 April 2018 to raise money and awareness for the charity.

Gemma Nelson, 28, from Colchester, along with her husband, Jamie, 29, were elated after the birth of their first child, Pollyanna, in March 2016. However, at only 12 weeks old, Pollyanna began to suffer from severe constipation. As her condition deteriorated, Gemma rang 111 and was advised to take her baby straight to Colchester General Hospital. Doctors noticed she was breathing erratically and sent her for a chest X-ray, which revealed she had congenital diaphragmatic hernia (CDH). Pollyanna's diaphragm had failed to form correctly and had therefore allowed her bowels and intestines to move into her chest cavity, which was putting intense pressure on her heart and lungs. Within just a few hours she required an emergency transfer to Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge for lifesaving surgery. **Mum, Gemma, who runs a small business specialising in mother and baby wear, says:**

"When the doctors discovered what was wrong with Pollyanna they acted fast and were immediately on the phone to Addenbrooke's Hospital. We felt like our lives shattered into a million pieces when we found out that our baby had just a 50% chance of surviving the major operation she needed to save her life. Doctors advised us that even if she survived the operation, it was likely that Pollyanna would suffer from health complications such as congenital heart disease (CHD) and problems with her lungs and breathing, as a result of them being squashed.

"She was put in an incubator and as her condition deteriorated she was rushed to Cambridge with me in the ambulance with her and Jamie behind in the car. We were absolutely beside ourselves. Travelling from Colchester to Cambridge is a long, busy journey and we were petrified that something would happen on the way and we'd be stuck in traffic. Thankfully nothing happened and even though it felt like the longest journey of our lives, we were soon at Addenbrooke's Hospital with our baby.

"We were on the paediatric intensive care unit (PICU), feeling lost and helpless when one of the nurses told us we would be staying at The Sick Children's Trust's Acorn House, just minutes from Pollyanna's hospital bedside.

"She handed us the key and told us that there was a team of people over there who would show us around and support us in whatever way they could. The sense of relief we felt was incredible. To be given the opportunity to stay so close to our daughter and never have to be more than a few minutes away when she was so poorly was more than we could've asked for at that moment.

"The support we had from the minute we walked through the door at Acorn House to the moment we left was outstanding. Acorn House was not just a room, it was truly a 'Home from Home'. Jamie and I were able to look after ourselves and take time out so we could be stronger for our daughter. Instead of travelling every day and dealing with the constant worry of not being by her side, we were at Acorn House where we knew that at any time we could just nip across and see her whenever we wanted.

"We stayed for a week at Acorn House while Pollyanna underwent her lifesaving surgery and recovered. The doctors who operated on her couldn't believe how she had survived undiagnosed for so long and thankfully were able to move her intestine back into her abdomen and repair the hole in her diaphragm."

Acorn House supports families with sick children being treated at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge. It supports families emotionally and practically with a shared dining area, living room, playroom for children, full laundry facilities and, importantly, there are direct telephone lines to the hospital wards in all 15 bedrooms. **Mum, Gemma, continues:**

"Without The Sick Children's Trust we wouldn't have been able to be beside our daughter during her time of need. And it's because of the charity that so many families, like ours, can be close to their seriously ill children. On the walls of Acorn House there are stories of how this amazing charity has helped so many families be with their children. And during our stay we met parents like ourselves who felt the same gratitude and would've been lost without The Sick Children's Trust.

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“I have decided to run the marathon because it is something I have never done and I want to give something back to these incredible people who were there for us and help fund a room for other parents. Pollyanna is now 19 months old and fighting fit. She was so incredibly lucky to have no ongoing conditions and in January was given the all clear. She is our little miracle.”

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 the charity £30 to support a family for one night. **Acorn House Manager, Abi Abdel-aal, says:**

“When Gemma told us that Pollyanna had been given the all clear and has no lasting side effects of her condition, we were all so pleased. She is such a gorgeous little girl and to think back to how distraught Gemma and Jamie were when we met them is horrible.

“As a charity we rely on voluntary donations so that we can continue to run our ten ‘Homes from Home’ across the country, supporting families with seriously ill children in hospital. The money Gemma raises from the marathon will make a huge difference to many families who need our support.”

To get behind The Sick Children’s Trust and sponsor Gemma visit her Just Giving site https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/gemma-nelson3

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

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