Navy Dad and Team Prepare Seven Day Trek Across The Country ‘By Any Means’

Thursday 4 May, 2017

Four Royal Navy officers aboard Britain’s biggest warship are getting set to make their way over 800 miles from Plymouth to Newcastle upon Tyne in seven days to raise money for The Sick Children’s Trust and the Children’s Heat Unit Fund (CHUF).

HMS Ocean Petty Officers Chris Orkney, Kieran Woodward, Jamie Marples and Steve Groves are hoping to raise £3,000 for both charities as thanks for supporting Chris’ family when his son, Declan, needed major open heart surgery at Freeman Hospital in Newcastle.

When Declan was just four months old, he was diagnosed with a hole in the heart, and by the time he was two and a half years old he had to undergo lifesaving surgery to fix his heart at the specialist hospital. While Declan underwent open heart surgery and recovered on the children’s heart unit, Chris and wife Nicola were supported at Scott House, run by The Sick Children’s Trust. Scott House is free ‘Home from Home’ accommodation located on the hospital grounds and meant that Declan’s parents were never more than just a few minutes’ walk from his side. **Dad Chris, from Morpeth, says:**

“Being told that the only way to save Declan’s life was for him to have major open heart surgery was horrendous, but immediately we felt supported by The Sick Children’s Trust and CHUF. We were introduced to the team on the paediatric intensive care unit (PICU) who would be looking after Declan which eased some of our worries – they were totally amazing from the moment we were introduced. And it was at this point that a support nurse told us that we would be given a room at a place called Scott House, run by The Sick Children’s Trust. We cannot put into words how relieved we were to hear that there was somewhere for us to stay, so we could be by Declan’s side at all times. It meant we didn’t have to leave him at his most vulnerable.

“On the day of his surgery, we feared for Declan. We can’t begin to describe what we were going through; it was as if it was someone else’s life that we were just walking through. We almost didn't feel human. But Declan surprised us all with how well he did. In fact, he was out of hospital after five nights. If you met him today, you’d never know what he’s been through - he’s like a new little boy. He’s no longer tired or breathless and has more energy than ever! This is all thanks to the amazing team at Freeman Hospital, we cannot thank them enough.”

Declan’s family want to thank The Sick Children’s Trust and CHUF for being there for them in their time of need. And on Friday 12 May, Chris and his fellow officers will embark on their mammoth challenge to raise vital funds for both charities. **Chris adds:**

“We are so grateful to the team at Freeman Hospital and Scott House for giving us so much support during this time. When Declan was recovering on PICU, we spoke to many families who had children there too, fighting for their lives, and many families who were being supported by Scott House. We realised just how lucky we were. And because of that we are fundraising for the both The Sick Children’s Trust and the Children’s Heart Unit Fund (CHUF).

“The ship was so supportive when Declan was poorly and have gone above and beyond since Declan’s been on his road to recovery. I wanted to do a charity event and ‘By Any Means’ was an idea born in the mess on-board HMS Ocean. And since then it has grown! The four of us will have to make our way up the gangway of HMS Ocean in Plymouth to The Sick Children’s Trust’s Scott House with just the clothes on our backs, our ID cards and a mobile phone. We’ll have no money and will simply have to charm our way up North while completing challenges set by other officers – such as making our way to Land’s End, appearing on a national breakfast show and getting a photo outside Downing Street. We’re hoping to raise £3,000 by doing this challenge for The Sick Children’s Trust and CHUF along with raising awareness wherever we go.”

The Sick Children’s Trust runs ten ‘Homes from Home’ across the country supporting families with seriously ill children in hospital with free accommodation, minutes from their child’s hospital bedside. Scott House supports families with children in Freeman Hospital, it has 18 en-suite bedrooms, a transplant flat and communal living and dining areas. **Scott House Manager, Andrew Leadbitter, says:**

“It’s wonderful to hear how well Declan is doing since his open heart surgery and we’ delighted that Chris, Kieran, Jamie and Steve are undertaking this incredible, adventure challenge for us.

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“Although our ‘Homes from Home’ are free of charge for families, it costs the charity £30 to support a family with a seriously ill child for one night. The money they raise will have a huge impact by helping us support more families with children at Freeman Hospital.”

CHUF offers support to the children, and their families, of those who have undergone treatment at the Children’s Heart Unit of the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle. **Senior Fundraising Manager, Charlotte Campbell, says:**

“We’re immensely grateful to Chris and his colleagues for choosing to raise significant funds for CHUF. Funds raised will help us to continue to provide vital equipment and additional holistic care to help children born with, or who develop, serious heart conditions.”

To find out more and support the ‘By Any Means’ challenge – please visit: http://bit.ly/2psz7sk

For further information about The Sick Children’s Trust, please visit www.sickchildrenstrust.org and for further information on CHUF, please visit: http://www.chuf.org.uk/

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