Parents back chocolate campaign to raise money for sick children's charity

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The parents of a little boy who underwent open heart surgery at just a few months old are calling on their local community to support to The Sick Children's Trust's Big Chocolate Tea fundraiser this April.

Kim Gautier and Paul Wheeler from Ilford, Essex, were given free 'Home from Home' accommodation by The Sick Children's Trust so that they could be a few minutes' walk from their son's bedside while he underwent life-saving open heart surgery at Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH).

The couple were told that had it not been for the open heart surgery performed on their son, he would not have made it home. Lewis, now eight months old, had a serious heart defect which meant his heart began to narrow shortly after he was born. The tot required specialist treatment at GOSH where the family were supported by The Sick Children's Trust for four nights so that they could remain close to their son. **Kim, who stayed at Guilford Street House with partner Paul, says:**

“For the time it took Lewis to have his operation and recover, we had somewhere which was just two minutes from his bedside. We could be with him in an instant. We didn't have to worry about leaving him or getting a call in the middle of the night and rushing to be back at his side. Although Ilford is not a million miles away, it feels like it is when your son is fighting for his life.

“We stayed at Guilford Street House for four nights, but there are some families who stay for much longer. Luckily for us, Lewis made a miraculous recovery. He was expected to take around two weeks to recover, so we would have been at Guilford Street over Christmas. But the he had different ideas. He decided he wanted to be home for Christmas and made sure he was!

“Since we've left Guilford Street House, Lewis has been absolutely fine. He's a normal baby – rolling over, laughing, smiling and enjoying life. You wouldn't' believe all he's been through. He does, of course, have a few stepping stones ahead of him, but we are just so relieved to have him back at home.”

Kim and Paul are joining The Sick Children's Trust's Big Chocolate Tea fundraising event from 22 April – 2 May and are calling for their local community to get involved too. Big Chocolate Tea is aims to raise thousands of pounds to help support more families across the UK with 'Home from Home' accommodation when their child is sick in hospital.

It costs on average £28 per night to provide a family with a room in one of the charity's 'Homes from Home' which include access to communal kitchens, bathrooms, living rooms and dining rooms alongside a direct telephone line from each bedroom to the hospital ward. **Guilford Street House Manager Tina Thake says:**

“It's wonderful that Lewis is getting on so well now – we enjoy his regular visits to see just how well he is doing. Kim and Paul had never heard of The Sick Children's Trust before and now, after having supported them, they really want to help other families who may be in a similar situation. Big Chocolate Tea is a fun-filled fundraising event that anyone can get involved with and we hope this year we will raise thousands of pounds to help hundreds more families.”

If you'd like to find out more about how you can get involved, please visit:
http://www.sickchildrenstrust.org/bigchoctea/

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