Parents of extremely premature baby boy are smashing their fundraising target for ‘lifesaving’ charity

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The parents of a baby born at just 25 weeks – who spent the first four months of his life battling for survival – are raising money for The Sick Children’s Trust as thanks for supporting them in free accommodation whilst their son received lifesaving treatment.

Parents Lee and Charlotte Bradford, from Wakefield, are on a fundraising mission to thank The Sick Children’s Trust for giving them a ‘Home from Home’ when their son, Thomas, was being treated in Leeds General Infirmary (LGI).

25 weeks into her pregnancy, Charlotte suffered from a complete placental abruption and was rushed by ambulance to Pinderfields Hospital where she was given a general anaesthetic and taken straight into theatre. Having lost over two litres of blood, doctors performed an emergency caesarean and Thomas arrived dangerously early on 12 May 2015. With the hospital unable to look after such a premature baby and LGI full, Thomas was immediately transferred to the Jessop Wing at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital in Sheffield.

At just ten days old Thomas began to deteriorate and was rushed into theatre with a perforated bowel. The operation appeared to be a success and at one month old he was transferred back to the family’s local hospital in Wakefield. However, a month later Thomas rapidly became seriously unwell with suspected necrotising enterocolitis (NEC), a condition where parts of the bowel become inflamed and begin to die, and he was rushed to LGI. For 11 weeks while Thomas underwent lifesaving treatment, his family were supported by The Sick Children’s Trust at its Eckersley House, located at the hospital.

And now Lee, 43, and three work colleagues will take part in the 10km MoRun in Temple Newsam on 4 November, while Charlotte, 34, is organising a Christmas bake sale at West Yorkshire Police Wakefield District Headquarters in mid-December to raise money for the charity. Dad, Lee, who works alongside his wife Charlotte as a Communications Operator for West Yorkshire Police, says:

“When we first arrived at LGI we felt sick with worry and were at our wits’ end. We spent three days in a room on Thomas’ ward initially so when a room at Eckersley House became available for us we were very relieved. Especially as we’d had very little sleep and it was looking like we may have to go home and make the trip to the hospital every day. Home was only 50 minutes away, but neither of us were prepared to leave Thomas in Leeds, so to be given a ‘Home from Home’ literally a stone’s throw away was a lifesaver.

“When Thomas was transferred back to Pinderfields, we both thought he was doing so well. And when he took a turn for the worse and was rushed to LGI our lives fell apart once again as we realised just how sick he was. It felt like we had allowed ourselves to buy into a false sense of security, but even in our desperation Eckersley House offered us comfort and respite. The Sick Children’s Trust gave us a room totally free of charge at Eckersley House for 11 weeks. It was incredible”

During his time at LGI, Thomas underwent a further four surgical procedures with his parents never more than a couple of minutes away at Eckersley House. Mum, Charlotte, who up until 25 weeks experienced a ‘dream pregnancy’, says:

“It was very touch and go when Thomas arrived at LGI. We weren’t sure he was going to pull through, his little body just seemed to be shutting down. His lungs collapsed soon after we found out he had NEC, and at that point we began to fear the worst and called family members to prepare them for the worst.

“Thankfully, after his operation he began to show signs of improvement. It really was a lifesaving procedure for our baby. As he began to grow stronger, we were able to take him off the ward for an few hours at a time. We could take him to our room at Eckersley House and feel like a normal family.

“To have a place to go with Thomas away from all the machines and the hospital environment meant so much to us and when friends and family came to visit they could see Thomas together at Eckersley House instead of having to visit one at a time on the ward. We couldn’t have coped without the help of The Sick Children’s Trust. We had been told having children would not be easy, but our experience has been a baptism of fire. We will forever be grateful to The Sick Children’s Trust and the support of Jane, Jude and the rest of the team, who were there for us day in, day out.

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“It really is a miracle that Thomas survived. Thomas will be told about the charity when he is older. He has recovered amazingly well and although he does have permanent brain damage from being born so premature, it doesn’t appear to have had devastating lasting effects. We were able to take him home when he was 19 weeks and six days old, only a month after his actual due date.”

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. Eckersley House Manager, Jane McHale, says:

“Charlotte and Lee were with us for a long time and when Thomas became strong enough, they were able to bring him to Eckersley House to meet the team. It was a wonderful experience to see them with their little boy in a home environment when he had only ever been in hospitals.

“As a charity, The Sick Children’s Trust relies entirely on voluntary donations so we can continue to run our ten ‘Homes from Home’ across the country, supporting families with seriously ill children in hospital. The money Lee and his family have and will raise is going to make a huge difference to many families who need our support.”

To get behind The Sick Children’s Trust and sponsor Lee and his colleagues in the MoRun please visit: https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/lee-bradford1

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

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