Suffolk couple who spent daughter's first Christmas in hospital back charity appeal

Monday 7 December, 2020

A Suffolk couple who spent last Christmas by their daughter's hospital bedside 80 miles away from home are backing The Sick Children's Trust's Together this Christmas appeal to help keep families like theirs together this festive period.

Charlotte Herbert and Dominic Qefa, from Ipswich, celebrated Christmas with their daughter at Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH), London, after receiving the devastating news that she would be unlikely to live past summer 2020. Esther had become seriously ill just two months before when she contracted a rare virus, astrovirus, which caused severe diarrhoea and sickness. Unbeknown to the couple, Esther had had been living with severe combined immune deficiency (SCID) which meant she was unable to fight the virus off, making its impact more serious. Esther lost her abilities to walk and talk and remains on preventative medication and antivirals to combat the virus.

Esther was treated across three hospitals over three months, and during this time The Sick Children's Trust gave her parents a warm and comfortable place to stay at its 'Homes from Home', just minutes from her bedside. The couple stayed at Acorn House in Cambridge and spent the festive season being supported at Rainbow and Guilford Street Houses, located near GOSH. Charlotte and Dominic are backing the charity's Together this Christmas appeal which is asking for donations of £30 to give a family like Esther's a place to stay for one night over the festive period. **Charlotte said:**

"Esther's time in hospital would have been extremely challenging without having a place to stay. We couldn't both stay on the ward and living over two hours away from GOSH would've meant travelling there and back every day. After a long day on the ward the last thing you want to think about is driving home leaving your seriously unwell child, never knowing what could happen overnight and not be close. All you want to do is stay and be together to support each other.

"We didn't have set plans to celebrate Christmas, though we would've followed tradition and gone to my family's for lunch. We had visits from friends, my dad and sisters including on Christmas Eve and Day. It was lovely to be able to spend a bit of time with them and for them to be with Esther.

"Esther has come further than anyone expected or thought which is amazing. We've had conversations with her consultants that we never thought we'd get the chance to, she is our little miracle and we're so incredibly proud of her. We are so grateful to everyone at the hospitals for our daughter's care and to The Sick Children's Trust for making our time there easier by giving us a place to stay in both Cambridge and London. We know that times are tough right now and have been this year, but we have donated what we can to help another family stay together when their child is in hospital, and hope others do too."

After a year of being separated from our loved ones, grandparents, brothers, sisters and friends, Christmastime is when we want to be together. The Sick Children's Trust wants to keep families together by their child's hospital bedside, and a donation of £30 can do that. **Jane Featherstone, Chief Executive at The Sick Children's Trust, said:**

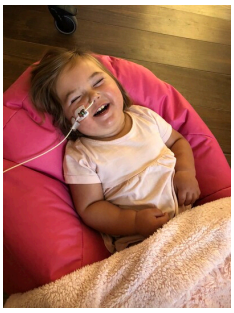
"This year we're grateful for the times we can be together with loved ones. For the families that we will be supporting, with a child in hospital over the Christmas period, being together will be harder than ever.

"With a donation of £30 from you, we can ease their worries and give them a place to stay just minutes from their child's hospital bedside in one of our 'Homes from Home' and ensure that they can be together this Christmas."

To donate to The Sick Children's Trust's Christmas appeal, visit sickchildrenstrust.org/donate

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