Thankful parents aim to raise £2,000 for children's charities

Friday 8 January, 2016

The parents of a little girl who has undergone three life-saving operations before turning one-year-old are thanking two charities that supported them when their daughter was seriously ill.

Next month, Debbie Hodkin, 24, and Philip Harkness, 27, from Workington will be holding a charity night to raise £2000 for The Sick Children's Trust and the Children's Heart Unit Fund (CHUF) after they faced every parents' worst nightmare last autumn.

The couple's daughter, Layla-Mae, became seriously ill at just ten days old when Mum noticed something wasn't right with her breathing. After calling the midwife, she rushed Layla-Mae to A&E in Whitehaven, where she was resuscitated, ventilated and incubated until a specialist team arrived to take her to Newcastle's Freeman Hospital – a two hour drive away from home – as her parents followed in the car behind. **Debbie says:**

“It was the most horrific journey of my life. Two hours is a long time, it just didn't seem to pass. At that point we weren't sure whether we'd be going to Freeman Hospital or The Royal Victoria Infirmary – but that didn't matter, all that mattered was getting our baby to safety and making sure she was OK."

At Freeman Hospital, the family were told that Layla-Mae had three heart defects - coarctation of the aorta, Atrioventricular Septal Defect and a leaking valve - and would need specialist treatment. Debbie and Philip, who also have a three-year-old son Macauley, had no idea how long Layla-Mae would need to stay in hospital for, and with little more than the clothes on their back they weren't sure how they'd cope. **Debbie continues:**

“It's all a blur, everything happened so fast. Not only did we live two hours away, but there was no way we'd leave our newborn to fight this battle alone. Thankfully, we are surrounded by wonderful family and friends who agreed to look after Macauley so we could focus on Layla-Mae. And we also found help at The Sick Children's Trust which gave us a place to stay from October until December.

“Scott House is at Freeman Hospital, which means we were no more than just a couple of minutes away from Layla-Mae. She needed us there; our little star went through her first surgery at just two weeks old and has since had another two lifesaving surgeries. Without The Sick Children's Trust, I don't know how we would have done it.

“It became our 'Home from Home', we could do normal things like and what made it so supportive was that there were other families in Scott House who were going through a similar thing, and that made a huge difference."

Debbie and Philip will be hosting their charity evening at on 12 February at the Trades Hall Social Club and the funds raised will be split between both charities. Scott House Manager, Andrew Leadbitter, says:

“When Debbie and Philip told us that Layla-Mae was going home just before Christmas, we were all delighted. The family were could spend her first Christmas together, back at the house and with their son Macauley which absolutely made his Christmas.

“We really appreciate the efforts that Debbie and Philip are going to, to help raise awareness and funds for Scott House. It costs £28 per room to support a family for a night so this fundraiser will make a huge difference to many families across the North East who may find themselves in a similar situation."

The Sick Children's Trust runs two 'Homes from Home' in Newcastle. Alongside Scott House, which opened in 2014, the charity supports the families of seriously ill children at The Royal Victoria Infirmary through its Crawford House.

To find out more about The Sick Children's Trust, please visit: www.sickchildrenstrust.org

N.B. The charity night has now sold out, but the family would very much appreciate any kind donations or raffle prizes, for more information visit: https://www.justgiving.com/lyndsay-Smith4/

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