William Starts School Despite Being Given Little Hope of Survival

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A little boy who nearly died at birth marked a huge milestone earlier this month as he started school for the first time.

For William Ryder, four, from Doncaster, starting school was something his parents never dreamt until recently. William's battle started before he was even born when at 18 weeks, his twin was miscarried and at 20 weeks his parents – Michelle and Paul – were advised to terminate the pregnancy as William would be born with severe brain damage. However, Michelle and Paul – who went through IVF treatment – decided to see what decision William would make.

William was born at St George's Hospital, London, at just 27 weeks weighing 535g. For the first four months of his life he was kept in the hospital's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and after that was transferred to the family's local hospital – Doncaster Royal Infirmary – for another five months on NICU. However, because of his condition William was admitted to intensive care at Sheffield Children's Hospital on two occasions once for four weeks and another for three weeks for specialist treatment. During this time, his parents were supported with free 'Home from Home' accommodation at The Sick Children's Trust's Treetop House so that they could be with their son at all times.

Since then, William has had to undergo frequent visits to the hospital and is currently facing his biggest challenge yet – severe uncontrolled epilepsy. Despite this, the brave youngster has not let this hold him back and was determined to start school earlier this month. **Sick Children's Trust's Ambassador Michelle says:**

"It was really hard watching William leave for school. For the last four years I have been Williams's full time carer, and as a result we have spent so much time together. So, seeing him set off for school was a huge mixture of emotions, but the biggest thing I felt was pride.

"At times, we were told William wouldn't make it. And the doctors were certain that he wouldn't. But each time he has proven them wrong and he continues to amaze everyone around him. Due to his brain injury, William is non– verbal, has profound developmental delays alongside severe epilepsy. However he is advancing much further than expected and can do a lot more than he should be able to. He has defied the odds and beaten everyone's expectations.

"William is one determined little man – he never gives up. We've been told he is the king of his class at school and we're so proud of how far he's come. There aren't enough words to describe this feeling."

William – who loves the swings, loves to sing and loves to dance – continues to travel to Sheffield Children's Hospital for treatment, and Mum Michelle says these trips over the last few years have been made more manageable because of The Sick Children's Trust's 'Home from Home'. **Michelle continues:**

"Doncaster and Sheffield may not seem far apart – but when you receive a call to say your son has crashed, the difference between being 20 minutes away and two minutes can be life altering. Having a 'Home from Home' given to us by The Sick Children's Trust was a Godsend. Since our first time at Treetop House we have been supported by The Sick Children's Trust on a number of occasions, allowing us to be close to William whenever we've needed to be.

"There have been many times that we have nearly lost William and the worry and stress is a huge physical and emotional drain. Treetop House is much more than a place to rest your head and have your dinner. They are a safe, warm environment where you can go and cry, away from your seriously ill child, but be back by their hospital bedside within minutes."

The Sick Children's Trust runs two 'Homes from Home' in Sheffield supporting families with seriously ill children at Sheffield Children's Hospital. Both houses – Treetop and Magnolia – offer families a private bedroom with access to communal kitchens, living rooms and laundry facilities. Although accommodation is free to families, it cost the charity £30 to support a family for one night. **Treetop House Manager Ann Wyatt says:**

"We are absolutely delighted to see William heading to school! William has battled so hard all of his life

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and you would never believe that this little boy wasn't expected to even live a day. To see all he is achieving – William is living proof that sheer determination can get you anywhere. "

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

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