World Prematurity Day 2018

Monday 12 November, 2018

The Sick Children's Trust is joining other leading children's charities in the global movement to raise awareness of preterm birth and take action on behalf of the 15 million babies born early every year.

On World Prematurity Day, Saturday 17 November, families, health professionals, charities and organisations from all over the world direct the spotlight onto premature birth with media campaigns, local events and other activities to raise awareness amongst the public of issues related to babies being born too soon.

Organisations involved in World Prematurity Day provide support to anyone affected by premature birth, who experiences the struggle for survival and, all too often, the loss of a preterm baby. Together, with health professionals and services, they are committed to raising awareness of pregnancy and prematurity.

One of these organisations is The Sick Children's Trust, a nationwide charity that supports families in free 'Home from Home' accommodation when they have a seriously ill child undergoing treatment in the country's leading paediatric hospitals. A number of the families supported by the charity have critically ill premature babies that require specialist care miles away from home. By giving them free 'Home from Home' accommodation just minutes from their baby, the charity enables families to spend as much time as possible with their loved one as well as offering practical and emotional support and easing financial burdens.

Luna Riley, from Thetford, was born at 34 weeks weighing just 3lb 4oz. She contracted necrotising enterocolitis, a life-threatening infection where part of her bowel became inflamed and began to die. Luna required emergency lifesaving surgery at The Rosie Hospital in Cambridge. Whilst she recovered from the operation her parents, Rhiannon and Zak, were given a room at Chestnut House, one of ten 'Homes from Home' run by The Sick Children's Trust. Located just moments from the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) where Luna was being treated, Chestnut House kept her Mum and Dad by her side. Studies have shown that enabling parents to be involved in their baby's care, including facilitating skin-to-skin contact, breastfeeding and opportunities to form early bonds, improves health outcomes for premature babies. **Mum, Rhiannon, whose grandmother recently raised over £300 for The Sick Children's Trust, says:**

"Chestnut House was somewhere to retire when it all got too much on the ward and a place of sanctuary at night when we needed to rest in order to be strong for Luna the following day. We could even cook meals in the well-stocked kitchen to keep ourselves nourished. She was so tiny and so vulnerable and for a while we didn't know if she was going to pull through. Because we were staying so close to her, and there was a direct phone line in our bedroom to the ward, we did not have the worry of thinking we wouldn't make it to her hospital cot side if anything changed."

Another parent, Helen Ledster, from Hoddesdon, was supported in Chestnut House when her son, Flynn, was born prematurely at just 27 weeks. Flynn was immediately ventilated and admitted to NICU to undergo lifesaving treatment. Born too early and very small, he remained in hospital for six months. Flynn is now home, but continues to require oxygen treatment, due to his prematurity. **Helen, says:**

"I was worried about where we were going to stay after I gave birth and I was worried about being in a hospital so far away from home. To be over an hour away from William, when you've got to produce milk, express it, take it onto the ward for feeds, on top of the stress of going backwards and forwards and missing time with him, is just not feasible. You need to be there all the time. Thanks to The Sick Children's Trust I could focus on being there for my baby and not on where my family would sleep."

Charities like The Sick Children's Trust are vital for families experiencing complex trauma. On average, two million children in the UK require hospital treatment each year. Every day, babies are born too early or too small, or are diagnosed with serious and life-threatening illnesses that leave them fighting for life. They often have to be transferred to specialist hospitals far from home to receive critical medical treatment. **Joy Darling, Head of Operations at The Sick Children's Trust, says:**

"World Prematurity Day is a time for parents and families across the world to both celebrate and commemorate their premature babies' lives and an opportunity to break the silence around safe pregnancy and preterm births in the UK. It is also an awareness campaign to ensure all parents in the UK get the best possible care, wherever they live, when they need it most.

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“With one in ten babies being born premature we support many families in our ‘Homes from Home’ with preterm babies. Often these babies spend many months in hospital, with many not going home until way past their due date. We are working towards a future whereby every parent with a premature baby never has to be more than a few moments from their hospital bedside, so they can forge vital early bonds and create memories during this traumatic time.”

For further information about World Prematurity Day, please visit
https://www.bliss.org.uk/support-bliss/world-prematurity-day

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

Ends

Notes to Editors:

About The Sick Children’s Trust

The Sick Children’s Trust is working to a future where every family with a seriously ill child in hospital will be able to stay together, just minutes from their child’s bed during their treatment.

We believe keeping families together significantly improves the recovery of seriously ill children. We provide free, high-quality ‘Home from Home’ accommodation, as well as emotional and practical support, to families with sick children in hospital in the UK.

The Sick Children’s Trust was founded in 1982 by two paediatric specialists Dr Jon Pritchard and Professor James Malpas. Today we have ten ‘Homes from Home’ at major hospitals around the country where families can stay free of charge.

We support 4,000 families every year, and there is a growing demand for our ‘Homes from Home’ as children must increasingly travel long distances to get the specialist treatment they need.
www.sickchildrenstrust.org

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