York man on fundraising mission to thank charity for nearly two decades of support

Tuesday 10 July, 2018

A local man who has spent much of his life travelling miles to receive specialist hospital care is preparing to take on the Yorkshire Tough Mudder at the end of this month to raise money for The Sick Children's Trust.

Josh Ventress, 26 from York, was born with bilateral upper limb deformity and for 18 years underwent treatment and numerous operations at St James's University Hospital in Leeds – 70 miles away from his family home in Whitby.

Throughout his treatment at St James's, Josh's parents, Debbie and Liam Ventress, were supported by The Sick Children's Trust, which runs free 'Home from Home' accommodation for families with seriously ill children in hospital. Debbie and Liam were supported at the charity's Eckersley House, originally located at St James's for 17 years but based at Leeds General Infirmary since 2010. Eckersley House meant that his parents could remain by their son's hospital bedside, just a stone's throw away, throughout all his treatment. Now, Josh is hoping to raise £350 for The Sick Children's Trust to thank the charity for giving his parents a 'Home from Home' just minutes from his side. **Josh, an Army Welfare Worker, says:**

"My parents had no idea I would be born with this bilateral upper limb deformity, so I think it came as a shock. I was only a few months old when I was transferred to Leeds for my first operation and that's when they found out about Eckersley House. The charity supported them with free accommodation when I was admitted to St James's from then onwards which allowed them to be with me, for which I'll always be grateful.

"When I was younger, I was in the hospital for long stays often undergoing operations or having rotations to increase my mobility. By the time I was a teenager, I wanted to be in and out as quick as possible – I was always trying to get off the ward! A huge comfort throughout all this time though was knowing that my parents were close by if I needed them. Hospital for a child is a daunting place, and it was always so reassuring to know that my Mum could stay later on weeknights as she wasn't rushing home. She only had a short walk over to Eckersley House.

"I can't thank The Sick Children's Trust enough for the support it gave me and my parents. That's why I'm hoping to raise £350 so that the charity can be a 'Home from Home' for another family with a child in hospital."

The Sick Children's Trust runs ten 'Homes from Home' across the country, supporting families with seriously ill children in hospital. Since opening in 1993, Eckersley House has supported over 11,000 families with children undergoing treatment at either St James's Hospital or Leeds General Infirmary. This year, the 'Home from Home' is celebrating 25 years of supporting families with free accommodation, just minutes from their loved one's hospital bedside. **Josh's Mum, Deb Ventress, says:**

"Eckersley House has been a huge help to our family over the years. When we knew Josh was going to be transferred to Leeds, I was soon told that there was accommodation which was free and available to me. I still remember the relief I felt at those words. It meant that I didn't have to leave Josh alone in hospital.

"Over the years, Josh was in and out of Leeds and for the majority of our visits I would be supported at Eckersley House. The last thing you want to do when your child is in hospital is leave them at night, drive 90 minutes home and then wake up and drive for another 90 minutes back to the hospital. You want to be there when they close their eyes and open them again. And that's what Eckersley House allowed me to do. Be there by my son's side.

"Being at Eckersley House meant I could continuously be with Josh and not worry about leaving him at night, as I was just a few minutes away. When the lights were turned off on his ward, I would go back to Eckersley House and sit in the living room and watch television with other families who were in a similar situation to me. I even met a couple from Whitby whose daughter was on the ward. It was nice just to be able to chat and relax in a safe and secure place.

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“Eckersley House really did become a ‘Home from Home’ for our family. My husband Liam would come and stay on the weekends with me – and on summer days, when Josh was allowed off the ward, we would enjoy a picnic in the garden area with him. We have lovely memories of that time.

“We’re so proud of Josh – nothing ever bothers him! My mother’s instinct is telling me not to watch him take on the Tough Mudder but someone’s got to be there to take him to casualty after! I’m so thrilled that he’s doing this for The Sick Children’s Trust, it really means a lot to us all that he wants to thank the charity for what they did for our family.”

While the charity’s ‘Home from Home’ accommodation is provided free of charge for families, it costs The Sick Children’s Trust £30 to support a family for one night in a ‘Home from Home’. **Eckersley House Manager, Jane McHale, says:**

“We’re delighted to hear about Josh’s fundraising mission for The Sick Children’s Trust. We’re sure that he will absolutely love completing the challenge he has set himself!

“It really means a lot to us when families who we’ve helped get in touch to say that they want to fundraise to help others that are experiencing a similar situation. Over the years, Eckersley House has supported over 11,000 families with free ‘Home from Home’ accommodation, and with supporters like Josh, we will be able to keep more and more families together.”

To support Josh, please visit his fundraising page: http://www.justgiving.com/Josh-Ventress

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

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