Young Harry is an inspiration as he thanks charity at Christmas Carol Service

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A Guildford school pupil, who beat the odds after battling a life-threatening condition immediately after birth, will be taking centre stage at The Sick Children's Trust's Christmas Carol Service to say thank you to the charity for keeping his Mum and Dad by his side when he was seriously ill in hospital.

Harry Readhead, now 10, was just two hours old when doctors discovered that there was something wrong. Harry had a blockage in his digestive system which required emergency treatment at The Royal London Hospital – 35 miles away from the family's home in Guildford. At one day old he underwent extensive surgery. Throughout his treatment, his parents Will and Hilary were able to stay by his side, thanks to The Sick Children's Trust which provided free 'Home from Home' accommodation at Stevenson House, just minutes from Harry's cot.

Harry, who now swims for Guildford City Swimming Club and plays rugby for Guildfordians RFC, will give a reading of Christmas favourite ***The Shepherds and The Angels*** to an audience of over 600 guests on Thursday 3 December to say thank you on behalf of his family. **He says:**

“I'm really looking forward to the Christmas Carol Service, though I am a little bit nervous of reading in front of so many people – but I've been practicing like mad so it should be fine!

“My Mum and Dad tell me about when I was in hospital, I can't remember anything but they said I was never alone because they had a home in London called Stevenson House which meant they could be with me the whole time.”

The Sick Children's Trust runs ten 'Homes from Home' across the UK that provide practical and emotional support to the families of sick children – last year, the charity helped around 3,600 families. It costs £28 per night to provide a family with a room in one of the 'Homes from Home' so that a child can have their loved ones right by their side. **Dad Will, who earlier this year raised over £400 after completing the Royal Parks Half Marathon, says:**

“We're really looking forward to seeing Harry read to all the guests at the Christmas Carol Service. We are incredibly proud of our son – he's come so far. He is simply an inspiration.

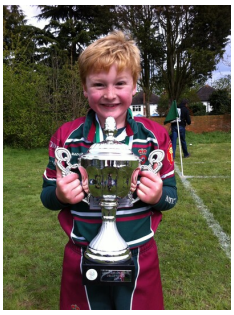
“The hardest moment in my life was signing consent forms before his operation, knowing that the worst case scenario was the death of my first born son at less than one day old. We were only 35 miles from home, but we couldn't bear the thought of leaving him and, fortunately for us, the staff on the ward put us in touch with The Sick Children's Trust's Stevenson House.”

The charity's Christmas Carol Service will take place on Thursday 3 December from 6:30pm at St Marylebone Parish Church, London. The service will see celebrities including Vanessa Redgrave, Penelope Wilton, Ben Aldridge and Anita Dobson give readings and guests can expect an evening of merriment with the nation's favourite Christmas carols and festive musical performances. **Will continues:**

“The Sick Children's Trust is an invaluable service, without which parents would either have to find and fund their own accommodation or commute sometimes hundreds of miles between home and hospital. I firmly believe it is vitally important for a child to know that their family is close by, and The Sick Children's Trust does an amazing job of making that possible. Please join us in supporting them and in turn helping other families with seriously ill children stay together.”

To find out more about The Sick Children's Trust's Christmas Carol Service and buy tickets, please visit: http://www.sickchildrenstrust.org/Get_involved/Special_Events/ChristmasCarolService2015/index.html

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