



My daughter Courtney was born in January with her bowels on the outside of her body. She was immediately rushed to Sheffield Children's Hospital and was taken into intensive care as soon as she arrived into the world.

It was an immensely frightening time for my boyfriend Chris and I, the most precious moment had turned into the most scary within minutes. We really didn't know what was happening. Life was turned upside down within hours of giving birth to our beautiful baby girl. We had no idea how long she would remain in hospital and hadn't even thought about where we would stay that night, let alone the following weeks and months that Courtney would receive treatment in hospital.

We live an hour's drive away from Sheffield and there was no way I could comprehend leaving my new born baby daughters side, not for one minute, let alone overnight! Thankfully we were offered a room in Treetop House, The Sick Children's Trust Home from Home on the top floor of the hospital – and to be honest I'm not sure how we would have coped without it.

Obviously we didn't have much time to pack or prepare ourselves, but even in those first few days we coped because Treetop House really does have everything you could need. We've been here for 10 months now, and it truly has become our Home from Home.

After numerous tests it was discovered that half of Courtney's small bowel had died and the rest of her bowel doesn't work. She is being fed intravenously while we wait for an operation to cut some of her bowel out. If she still can't feed properly after the operation, then she'll need a bowel transplant.

Staying in Treetop House has meant that we can have a rest when we need it. Often when Courtney is asleep, I'll return to my room to catch up on much needed sleep too, knowing that the nurses on duty will call me when she wakes up. Having me so close by is brilliant for Courtney, if she is unsettled or upset, I can be by her bedside within minutes, day or night - it must help her to know I am here for her no matter what.

Plus it's comforting to meet other parents staying in Treetop House who are in a similar situation. Being far from home means I don't have the support network of old friends, so the new friends I've made in the house are very important to me.

And because Treetop House is within the hospital, I am able to bring Courtney up to the Home from Home, with all her medical equipment so we can have a family meal together. I think it's vital that Courtney sees life outside the hospital ward and it's also great for us to do normal family things, such as watch TV, make a cuppa or play with Courtney.

Even though staying here is provided free of charge by The SCT, we still have bills to pay back home – my boyfriend Chris has managed to carry on working, he commutes every day from Treetop House. But at least he gets to spend time with his

daughter in the evenings and weekends, and we depend on each other for support to be able to cope with this situation.

We really couldn't have coped without the support of The Sick Children's Trust – I really can't put it any other way.

**Gemma, Courtney's mum**