



Having just returned with my family to live in my hometown of Carlisle after an 11 year stint in Holland, our 4 year old daughter Mia was rushed to hospital with suspected pneumonia. Mia has Down's Syndrome and suffers with bouts of pneumonia fairly regularly, so we were not overly concerned at this point. Unfortunately on the day my husband Eric arrived in England, Mia took a turn for the worse and was immediately transferred to The Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI) in Newcastle for emergency surgery.

We quickly made arrangements for my mum and brother to care for our eleven month old son Dylan, and followed the ambulance for the one and a half hour journey to Newcastle. Mia's tummy was swelling with every passing minute, doctors had no idea why and so she was taken into theatre on arrival at the hospital where they discovered she had a perforated ulcer – something more commonly found in older people.

That first night we were a bag of nerves...and endured a sleepless and very uncomfortable night curled up on the chairs in the parent's room.

We had no idea how long Mia was going to be in hospital for and we were not sure how we were going to cope. Staying in a local hotel was not an option because it would have proved extremely costly and also I didn't deem it safe for a woman to walk the streets of Newcastle on her own, should I be called back to the hospital late at night. We really did not want to leave Mia's side.

Thankfully we were offered a room in Crawford House – if the RVI was Mia's life saver...then Crawford House was ours. It was as if some of the stress and trauma of our situation had been lifted from our shoulders – we could wash our clothes, eat a proper dinner and get the rest we so dearly needed.

To have your own bedroom to sleep but remain on the hospital campus with a direct telephone linked to your child's ward is very reassuring; I knew I would be called should anything happen to Mia. And indeed it did. I was called at 1 am one night when Mia was having trouble breathing and I was able to be at her side within minutes.

The 'Home from Home' provided strength in all manner of ways – sharing our experiences with other families was definitely a great help. While staff on the wards offer words of comfort, it is their job, but for us and the other families it's our way of life.

It also meant that our baby son Dylan could come and join us. This was as important for him as it was for us. To see Mia's face light up when Dylan came to visit was just magical – when she got a little better, they would sit in the cot together and play.

After needing further surgery, Mia was in hospital for three and a half weeks and we stayed in Crawford House for the length of her stay. The operation had knocked Mia for six and she lost her confidence and was unable to walk very far, so for the two days before we left, we were able to take Mia to Crawford House where we enjoyed dinner together as a family and watched Mia and Dylan have fun in the playroom. It was fantastic to have that step between hospital and home – and it really helped us all to adjust again.

Thanks to The Sick Children's Trust we got through those three weeks as a family – that

means the world to me.

Wendy, Mia's mum