

# Little girl's saviours

SEVERAL grateful parents volunteered to meet the team of inspectors who visited the Freeman Hospital last May as part of their plan to reorganise the 11 UK heart units.

Among them was entrepreneur Graham Wylie – the co-founder of Sage who now runs the IT company TSG and Close House golf club and hotel.

The tycoon was keen to tell the team of the work the unit carried out to save his daughter Kiera's life when she was two days old.

Yet on the day of their visit, by sheer coincidence, the committee actually got to meet Graham in the hospital's Paediatric ICU, where staff had just saved little Kiera's life for a second time, after her heart stopped beating.

He said: "The first time they met me was when I was in the ICU with Kiera, but I also went in for the meeting with five other parents and I told them Kiera would have died had she not been there. It's not just about surgeons and operations, it's the can-do attitude, the resources and the support structure they have, such as Paddy's visits."

"I have immense grat-

MIRACLE: Kiera, left, and twin sister Zahra

itude for what they are doing." Kiera endured open-heart surgery in December 2009 when she was just two days old, having been diagnosed with a complex heart condition while she was still in her mother's womb.

Later this year the one-year-old – who has a twin sister Zahra – will undergo a major operation which will hopefully repair her heart once and for all, and Graham and her dotting mum, Andrea, who moved from Northumberland to Newcastle to be closer to the hospital, have made the Children's Heart Unit Fund their chosen charity.

As well as planning a number of events to raise funds for CHUF, Graham is spending £80,000 on a new ECMO – the machine which saved his daughter's heart – and has already spent some £15,000 on a baby therm unit.



# At the heart of kids' care

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## IT is a place where miracles are worked, where young lives are saved in their hundreds.

But despite its amazing work, this leading North hospital's heart unit could soon close as part of a Government review.

The Freeman Hospital came under the Government microscope last year, as part of a review of the UK's 11 heart units.

Now, having been delayed twice, a public announcement on the issue is to be made on Wednesday, February 16.

Having provided such a superb service over the years, users and staff clearly hope it will remain open, but there is still a chance the Government will decide otherwise, instead favouring units which are more geographically centralised.

Should that happen, the unit could close on that very same day because all it would take is for its surgeons to leave and go to work in one of the chosen heart units.

Senior nurse Paddy Walsh, the unit's paediatric liaison officer, will remain in her role regardless of the decision, yet she too hopes she can continue her work with the unit's staff, which includes five

## Hospital's amazing work may be at risk in review

PASSIONATE: Paediatric liaison officer Paddy Walsh at the children's heart unit

children's heart specialists, two children's surgeons and a huge team of junior doctors, specialist registrars, senior house officers and paediatric nurses.

She said: "At this time, we are hoping we will be a centre that stays open."

"I think we are very lucky to have a dedicated, close-knit team which is passionate and enthusiastic about the work we do and we are proud to be able to work in a centre that can offer such specialist services."

The Freeman also benefits from the charity CHUF, the Children's Heart Unit Fund, which was founded in 1979 with the aim of raising money for equipment, facilities, research and aftercare for Ward 23 and the Paediatric Intensive

Care Unit (PICU).

As well as paying for items of equipment both large and small, it has equipped an indoor and outdoor play area for children while they recover.

The Freeman is one of only two hospitals in the country to perform heart transplants on children – the other being Great Ormond Street in London.

Out of 33,000 babies born in the North each year, some 300 will require heart surgery at the Freeman and more will require medical or outpatient treatment in the Children's Heart Unit.

When complex conditions are identified by doctors – even when babies are still in the womb – it's Paddy who visits the parents to reassure them that what



will happen next is not as rare as it sounds.

Later, when young patients are old enough for school, Paddy liaises with schools and health visitors, giving advice on how to look after the children and get the most of out education.

And wherever, or whatever, Paddy is doing, she always wears a broad, calming smile for everyone.

Indeed, everyone in the heart unit, on Ward 23, and the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit (ICU) has a matter-of-fact, 'can-do' attitude which instils confidence in everyone.

This may be a ward where life-changing events unfold, but you won't see any dramatics from the staff – the

atmosphere is always relaxed.

And the same can be said for the ICU ward, where bleeping of machines, dials and alarms is second nature to the staff running the smooth operation.

She said: "We've had tears of joy and tears of sadness and yes, I cry with the patients and the parents. If I didn't get upset or involved in my work I'd wonder what I was doing here."

"I thoroughly enjoy my job." The ward can hold up to 18 children and on an average day it's usually full. When the Sunday Sun visited, three youngsters were in the High Dependency Unit – a newly refurbished six-bed area – including a little girl who was sleeping off her anaesthetic

having just returned from an operation.

In the next room, a little boy dozed in his dad's arms, while another older boy in a separate room had lunch with his mum.

In the ICU, every single child has one nurse monitoring their every need 24-hours-a-day, including a six-day-old baby lying on a baby therm unit, recovering from open heart surgery to correct a complex condition.

Medical experts have advised there should be fewer, larger centres of expertise for cardiac surgery on babies and youngsters across England, prompting the Government's drive to reduce the number of units from 11 to eight.

Paddy sees that the Government's review is logical, and she and the rest of the staff can empathise with their counterparts at the 10 other units.

She said: "We are all waiting for the decision and hoping we will be able to continue to offer the services we do."

"It's been a tough time. And we all know the other centres and staff in the centres, and they are all going through the same as us."

She added: "The whole idea is to make centres bigger and safer, with more surgeons in each one, and this is what we have got to keep in focus – it's not a money-cutting exercise – and I just hope we are dignified in the way we react, whichever way the decision goes."



## March for teen

MORE than a thousand members of a community united in grief walked through their streets today in memory of a teenager who died in an attack.

Reamonn Gormley, pictured, described as an "outstanding young man", was stabbed as he made his way home with a friend after watching football in a bar.

The 19-year-old Celtic supporter died in hospital after he was attacked in Glasgow Road, Blantyre, South Lanarkshire, at about 10.55pm on Tuesday.

A 22-year-old man has been arrested in connection with his death.

Strathclyde Police estimated that between 1,200 and 1,400 people took part in today's march.

## Invitation to check out new courses

HUNDREDS of courses and apprenticeships on offer to would-be students at a North East college will be showcased at two drop-in events this month.

The open sessions at the Northumberland College campuses in Ashington and Ponteland are aimed at anyone interested in learning something new, considering a career change or wondering what to do when they leave school.

The first will be held at the College Road campus in Ashington from 4.30pm to 7pm on Tuesday, February 15, and will focus on the vast range of full and part-time courses.

These include hair and beauty, early years, construction, art and design and travel and tourism.

The following day, again from 4.30pm to 7pm, the Kirkley Hall centre near Ponteland will host an event promoting its portfolio of courses linked to the rural economy.

These include agriculture, horticulture and floristry, animal care and veterinary nursing, arboriculture, countryside, outdoor sport and renewable energies.

Tutors will be available at both sessions to give advice on all courses, and those who attend will be able to apply for a place immediately.

More information is available by going to www.northumberland.ac.uk or calling 01670 841200.

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## Living proof of the incredible care at children's heart unit

IT'S more a case of 'terrific twos' than terrible twos for little Sebastian Hollingsworth, because he can do no wrong in his parents' eyes.

Proud mum Nadine said: "After his experiences he's got every right to throw a tantrum – and I just can't get angry with him, he's so cheeky. And so hilarious."

Nadine, 34, and her husband Ivan, 35, were told their son was suffering from congenital heart defect tetralogy of Fallot when he was just 15 hours old.

After being born in North Tyneside General Hospital, he was whisked in an incubator to Newcastle's Freeman Hospital, where a team of experts explained he needed open heart surgery.

His consultant Richard Kirk initially thought

he'd have to undergo his surgery some time between nine and 12 months, when he had developed enough to cope with the invasive operation. But the surgery was brought forward when he took a turn for the worse when he was 16 weeks old.

He'll need a further operation some time between now and his sixth birthday – when his consultant decides his heart is working too hard – and in the meantime his parents are doing everything they can to thank the unit through fundraising, with the help of their celebrity pal, Sky Sports presenter Ben Shephard.

Last year, Ben and Ivan, a pharmaceutical rep – close friends from their university days – ran from Whitehaven to Tynemouth and raised more than £50,000 for CHUF, and this year they've stepped up the challenge.

They will cycle from Tynemouth to Whitehaven and then run back again.

Today, having celebrated his second birthday with a big family party at home in Whitley Bay, North Tyneside, Sebastian is testament to the amazing work of the children's heart unit.

Nadine, a business consultant, said: "In himself, Sebastian is brilliant. You'd never think he'd had surgery or he had a heart condition. "He's obsessed with Toy Story at the moment, and he has the occasional tantrum, throwing himself on the floor. I just laugh because I find it hard to get cross with him."

"I can't put into words how I feel about the heart unit – how do you put a value on a facility that saved your child's life?"

"They are incredible, and the support they give is amazing."

"When you're there all you think about is being able to go home, but when we left with Sebastian I was in floods of tears because I didn't want to leave them."

For information on the couple's fundraising, visit [www.seb4chuf.org.uk](http://www.seb4chuf.org.uk).

**HAPPY FAMILY:** Sebastian at home with mum Nadine and dad Ivan

**CHEEKY LAD:** Nadine Hollingsworth with her son Sebastian, who underwent heart surgery at 16 weeks

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