

# Boy who stole all our hearts

## Battling Buxton youngster to celebrate tenth birthday



Joshua Leech with parents Gavin and Rachel.

Medical experts frequently said they didn't think terminally-ill Josh would reach the age of two. But he has defied all of them and will mark his tenth birthday next Friday, June 25<sup>th</sup> with a special party.

Josh was diagnosed with microcephaly, which means he has a smaller brain than other children, when he was just a few weeks old. He was then also found to have cerebral palsy and intractable (not controlled) epilepsy. He has undergone a number of operations to improve his quality of life and his family know that every day they have with him is precious.

Josh has spent much of his life in and out of hospital and has to be fed through a tube in his stomach. Last November, he caught swine flu which saw him spending several weeks at Francis House Children's Hospice in Didsbury. He fought the virus but has been left permanently needing oxygen and with his lungs so damaged that any cold or virus could be fatal.

Rachel said: "We spent many weeks in Francis House Children's Hospice for end of life care. We didn't think we'd be bringing Joshy home but being the fantastic star that he is, he fought it and we made it home in December.

"Emotionally we're just beginning to pull ourselves together. Joshy is happy and chirpy now but it's unfortunately left him permanently needing oxygen. We're hoping that may change but I think that we need to accept that is probably how Joshy will be now. Joshy's lungs are badly damaged which means that any cold or virus could be fatal — however this is Joshy we're talking about. This has left me deciding to cram everything into this year.

"We have many, many poorly patches every year where he needs medical care which would put him in intensive care if it wasn't for the fact that we care for him palliatively.

"This is especially hard to cope with as we know that one of the bouts of pneumonia will take him away from us, but I'm confident that by us working round the clock and taking turns to care for Joshy through the night rather than him be in a hospital he fights harder and I feel that's why we've still got him.

"When we're exhausted from no sleep and emotionally drained we go into Francis House to get their support. We stay together as a family.

"I can still sleep with Joshy if I want to or if we need to sleep they'll cuddle him whilst we have a rest or eat. It's so important to us to be together as a family, including brothers Kieran and Brandon.

"We really are cramming life into minutes now and hoping for a miracles.

"However, Joshy, our little miracle, chose not to leave us in November and I'm so grateful for every extra second we get."

Josh captured the hearts of people in Buxton and the surrounding area when the Buxton Advertiser first featured his story and they rallied round to help, raising thousands of pounds for a sensory room of colours and sound for Josh, who is also cortically blind which means his eyes are healthy but his brain can't interpret the messages they send.

To mark the milestone they never thought they would see, Josh's parents Rachel and Gavin Leech have organised a special tenth birthday party on Sunday, June 27 at Buxton Rugby Club and they want anyone who has helped or supported Josh over the last ten years to go along.

Rachel said: "The support we have had from the local community has been amazing and it just keeps on going.

"We want to celebrate and thank everyone who has been a part of Joshy's life. So many people helped by fundraising, sponsoring others, doing three-legged pub crawls, darts marathons, jumping from planes and more. And then they have supported us as a family by messages, prayers and kindness. Thanks to having Joshy, we've seen the kindness, love and compassion that's out there in the world. It's all helped us and Joshy."

During the party, there will be a collection for Francis House Children's Hospice in Manchester, where Josh has spent a considerable amount of time receiving care.

Rachel added: "Francis House Children's Hospice have helped us in so many ways. I'm sure Josh wouldn't be here if it wasn't for their support and love."

The party will take place at Buxton Rugby club on Sunday, June 27 at 2pm. There will be nibbles and the club will also have a small selection of food available to buy.

People are asked to RSVP if possible to [rachelleech2000@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:rachelleech2000@yahoo.co.uk), call 0129871617 or text 07854 221 979. However, people can just turn up on the day if they are unable to reply in advance.

### **How Josh has brought love to other kids**

Over the last ten years, Rachel and Gavin have had to learn a variety of medical procedures to help care them care for Josh.

As well as discovering how to feed him, they have also learnt how to administer oxygen to him. He is now cared for at home by Rachel and Gavin and their family rather than having to spend time in hospital.

And despite having to look after Josh, and their two other children, Kieran and Brandon, Rachel and Gavin still find time to look after other disabled children.

Last year they were approved as a link foster family. This sees them looking after disabled children for a couple of nights while their parents get a much needed break.

Rachel explained: "As Joshy's got such complex health needs as well as severe disability, it means we can offer that to children who perhaps other link carers may be nervous of.

"We love this and have enjoyed getting to know the family and the gorgeous children who stay over.

"Joshy and our family comes first but it's so nice feeling that thanks to Joshy, we are better people and are able to support others."