

Proud day for little fighter



ONLY 20cm in length and weighing less than a bag of sugar, little Kieron Norton was not expected to make it through birth, let alone his first day of school.

At just 1lb 5ozs he was only the size of a pint glass and having been born after just 24 weeks of pregnancy, it would be fair to say it is a miracle he survived.

But not only did he survive, he went from strength to strength and grew into the smiling four-year-old boy he is today. And on Monday he started school at Worksop's Redlands Primary.

"He is a small four-year-old but he doesn't look out of place and all things considered, he has come a long way," said Kieron's proud father Andrew Norton, 31.

Kieron was born by emergency caesarian on 20th April 2000, after only a six month pregnancy. The pregnancy had been going fine when Kieron's mother Sharon began to experience chest pains.

Her doctor referred her to Bassetlaw Hospital where she was diagnosed firstly with pre-eclampsia followed by the liver and blood clotting disease HELLP syndrome.

Just 11 hours later Kieron was born. "Immediately before the birth, I was very calm," said Sharon, 35. "The nurse said that most women would be in mass hysteria at this stage but I didn't have time to think about how I was feeling."

The first time Sharon went to see Kieron, town planner Andrew was worried she would be shocked by all the wires and tubes that covered his tiny body. But as his mother, she thought he was perfect.

by Amy Burns

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"Andrew warned me about the way he would look but when I saw him I knew he was my baby. I had carried him for six months and maternal love just took over."

For the first three months of his life, Kieron stayed on the neo-natal ward at the Jessop Women's Hospital in Sheffield. Then he was transferred to Bassetlaw Hospital for a further three months.

In September 2000 he was allowed home but was kept on oxygen until February 2001.

Just before his first birthday, Kieron was diagnosed with cerebral palsy.

"At first it was like being run over by a bus, but the doctor told us early on that there could be complications, so we had time to get used to the idea," said Andrew.

At just three weeks old, doctors had discovered cysts on Kieron's brain and when they hadn't cleared up by the time he reached seven weeks old, the family was told he had suffered brain damage, which may affect his vision.

As it turned out, Kieron's vision is fine but cerebral palsy is a condition that affects posture and movement, and sufferers can find it hard to communicate or get around by themselves.

In order to help Kieron as much as possible, the family's church, Retford Baptist Church, decided to raise money to help buy specialist equipment.

"We have watched Kieron's progress from the start," said Retford Baptist Church pastor, John Brewster.

"When we knew that his family wanted some special equipment to help him to communicate, we decided to take it on board and pass on the fundraising to our younger members."



● Chris Honey, Redlands School head teacher, with Kieron, 4. (W50404/6a)
Inset: Kieron as a baby

Under the guidance of youth leader, Mark Gilmour, young church-goers set up a bouncy castle in the church and charged children and adults alike to bounce away the morning for money.

The event, dubbed Kieron's Day, raised £800 – twice as much as what was initially needed, plus a further £91.

In the meantime, experts who had been monitoring Kieron's condition, said the necessary equipment would be provided free of charge.

This left the door open for the church's donation of almost £1,000 to be used to purchase other vital pieces of equipment.

"They might look like games but they do help him communicate and we are very grateful to the church," said Sharon.

Kieron communicates through a mixture of language and signs and will use a touch screen communicator with electronic voice at school so he can join in with the other children.

Kieron's favourite character is Tigger, from Winnie the Pooh, and the family keep a small Tigger teddy he was pictured with at birth to demonstrate how much he has grown.

"We never thought this day would come," said Sharon. "We always said if he makes it to his first day at school then we'll go to the press and tell everyone our story because we want to celebrate this day and say how proud we are of him."

★★★
STARTING primary school is a big day in any child's life but on Monday it was even more special for four-year-old Kieron Norton. He was born three months prematurely, weighing less than a bag of sugar, and given only a 50/50 chance of survival by doctors. Yet four years on, this brave little boy has defied all the odds to attend his first day at Redlands School



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