

ORDEAL INSPIRED LAUNCH OF VITAL HEART DEFECT CHARITY

got a heart of gold

HELP OTHERS

Unfortunately little Dounya didn't stay well for long. After just five days at home she had become so breathless that she couldn't take her feed and had to be admitted to Criagavon Area Hospital.

Said Alexandra: "Because she wasn't gaining weight they decided to bring the operation forward and she was only four and a half months old when they performed open heart surgery to repair the holes in her heart."

Watching her tiny baby being stretchered into an ambulance on her way to theatre is an experience which Alexandra says will stay with her forever.

"I held Dounya in my arms when they put the mask over her face to sedate her and that's when it really hit me that I was handing my baby over and they were going to open her up," she said.

Little Dounya's surgery was a success and within days she was strong enough to go home and since then hasn't looked back.

Now a lively two-year-old, the only sign that anything was wrong is her scar and although she will have to have annual check-ups, her future looks bright.

Despite their ordeal, Alexandra knows that her daughter is one of the lucky ones and it is for the other babies and children whose CHD is more complicated that she decided to set up the charity.

Initially Alexandra struggled to



TRAUMATIC: Baby Dounya underwent major heart surgery



get the charity off the ground as she was pregnant with her youngest child Amani, now a year old, while also studying for an Open University degree in psychology.

It wasn't until she met local woman Ann Lavery that things really started to take off.

Alexandra explained: "Ann was looking for a worthy cause to benefit from her Halloween House which she opens every year to the public for charity.

"I approached her about CHD-NI and when she realised what I was trying to do she really helped get things moving."

Now fundraising co-ordinator and treasurer of the charity, Ann has thrown herself wholeheartedly into helping CHD-NI achieve its

objective of raising awareness of a condition which affects over 200 babies every year in Ulster.

CHD is the most common birth defect and the number one cause of death from birth defects during the first year of life.

Nearly twice as many children die from congenital heart disease each year as from all childhood cancers combined.

Research is needed, especially for those heart defects which are still difficult or impossible to repair.

"It is brilliant the charity has taken off. It just shows that if you have a passion and a group of people who want to make a difference then you can make it happen," added Alexandra.

For info log onto www.chd-ni.co.uk



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