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Millionaire hands out cuddly toys

4:21pm Wednesday 26th May 2010

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By Amanda Williams »

A NEW York businessman who has been shipping teddy bears to children on an Oxford hospital ward for two years has visited the city for the first time.

Millionaire Joseph Sprung launched the Bears 4 Kids foundation, which became Bear Givers, for children across the United States in 2002.

The Oxford Children's Hospital, at the John Radcliffe site in Headington, became the first UK beneficiary of the business tycoon's generosity in 2008.

On Tuesday, Mr Sprung visited children on wards at the hospital to hand out more than 150 teddy bears.

Children's Hospital fundraiser Penny Hambridge said the children were overjoyed at their special transatlantic gift.

She added: "They loved it.

"I think it really gives them something positive to associate being in hospital with and to remember the experience in a more positive light.

"Having something cuddly and fluffy to hold on to can really make a difference. They were over the moon with the gifts."

She added: "It was the first time Mr Sprung had visited the hospital. We are very grateful to him for giving the children a really positive experience."



Joseph Sprung and Diane Lempert with, from left, Jack Daly, Lottie Carlisle, Safya Bali and their bears

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Mr Sprung, who is described as a financial mogul, believes offering children who are ill, disabled or have learning disabilities a soft teddy can be therapeutic.

Mr Sprung, who was on a flying visit from New York, also handed out bears at The London Children's Hospital, and a school for children with autism spectrum disorders, also in London.

Bear Givers president Diane Lempert said the volcanic ash cloud had threatened his visit.

She added: "But we made it, thank God, and managed to hand out every single one of the bears, even leaving some in outpatients for children who are coming in for the day to enjoy.

"We had a wonderful experience last time we visited the John Radcliffe in 2008 and received some very heartfelt thank-you letters from some of the parents.

"We are delighted to be visiting such an amazing hospital again, this time with Joseph.

"Most of the comments we were getting were about how lovely and soft the bears were.

"We were made very, very welcome at the hospital and were glad to have made the trip."

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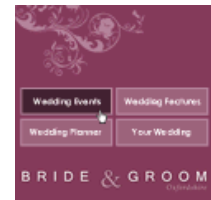
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