DONCASTER WELCOMES THE ARRIVAL OF NEW CHILDREN'S AIR AMBULANCE

News / Business aviation

There was a special arrival at Doncaster Sheffield Airport when the national Children's Air Ambulance charity landed at its new designated airbase from where it will launch missions to help to save young lives.

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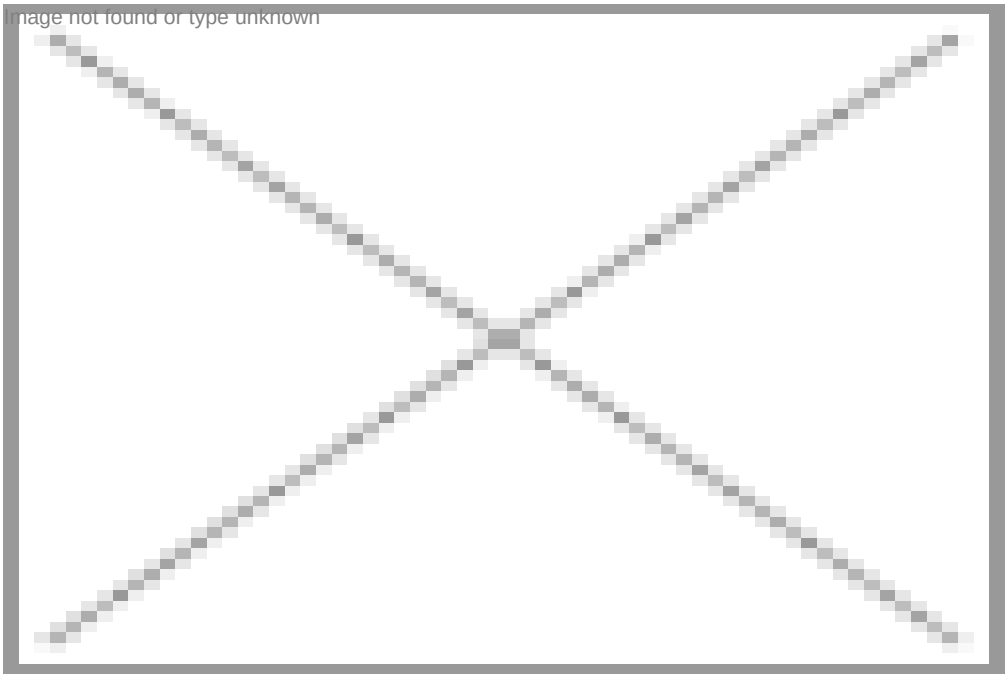

The momentous occasion was attended by Welcome to Yorkshire Chief Executive Sir Gary Verity, Mayor of Rotherham Cllr Alan Buckley and other dignitaries, as a seven-year project to provide a nationwide high speed transfer service for critically ill children and babies came to fruition.

The Children's Air Ambulance (TCAA) is the first and only dedicated paediatric and neonatal transfer helicopter service in the country operating four times faster than road transfer. It will be operational from Doncaster Sheffield week commencing Monday 17 September.

The charity is funded entirely by donations and works closely with nine NHS Clinical Partner Teams such as Embrace, a specialist, round-the-clock transport service for critically ill infants and children in Yorkshire and the Humber, which is associated with Sheffield Children's Hospital.

Speaking at a ceremony to unveil the new aircraft and airbase, TCAA CEO Andy Williamson said: "This is the culmination of a long and difficult journey to provide this unique service and I am very proud to see it come to fruition and of all those involved in making the dream in Yorkshire a reality.

"The difference the charity's two new helicopters will make to children, parents and NHS doctors and nurses involved in paediatric and neonatal specialist air transfers is very significant and that's what this charity is all about."

Since 2012 the charity have completed more than 300 missions with its clinical partners operating out of the Midlands with one aircraft but the decision to provide two helicopters at bases in the north and south of Great Britain will enable the charity to meet more needs with a target of 600 missions a year.

One of those who has seen first-hand the difference the transfer service can make to the health of a critically ill child is mum Gemma whose daughter Poppy was premature when she was delivered by emergency caesarean and suffered complications.

After undergoing lifesaving treatment, by a specialist paediatric team in Nottingham, the Children's Air Ambulance was able to fly Poppy home to Grimsby in just over an hour – considerably faster than a journey by road.

Thanks to the specialist equipment and highly trained NHS Specialist Transport Teams on board,

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Poppy could travel to her family home safely to recover with her loved ones around her.

Commenting on the transfer, Gemma said, “It was fantastic to hear that Poppy could be home in minutes. When we met the crew they were also amazing. You know when you feel so safe. We felt 100% reassured by the crew; that was when I knew she was going to be fine. Getting her home at that time was, well, amazing.

“If someone isn’t sure whether to leave a donation to the charity, I would say do it. People don’t realise how important the Children’s Air Ambulance is. You won’t regret it. I was lucky that Poppy was flying home, and was on the mend.”

The AgustaWestland 169 aircraft will be based in Doncaster Sheffield and Oxford, and will be the only intensive care helicopters in the country dedicated to transferring critically ill children and babies from local hospitals to specialist paediatric and neonatal treatment centres.

The bespoke equipment on-board includes a specially designed stretcher system and clinical interior, incubator and extra seat for a parent to be able to accompany their child. These state of the art facilities make the helicopters second to none in the provision of paediatric and neonatal transfers.

TCAA Director of Operations Richard Clayton added: “What a monumental day for the charity and for Yorkshire. It’s been an incredibly complex project to manage but now the exciting work really starts as we open our new airbase in readiness for transferring our first patient.

“Doncaster Sheffield provides the perfect location for us to work closely with our NHS Clinical Partners in delivering the highest level of paediatric neonatal care to the northern regions of the country.

“We’re very proud to launch our service in the heart of Yorkshire and look forward to working with supporters from across the region to ensure we’re able to keep our aircraft flying, keep hope alive and keep families together.”

The expansion of the charity and the service provided has been welcomed by the nine clinical teams nationwide that it works in partnership with and at absolutely no cost to the NHS.

“The team at Embrace are very excited about the launch of the new and improved AW169 Children’s Air Ambulance helicopter based at Doncaster,” explained Dr Steve Hancock, Lead Consultant (Paediatrics) at Embrace Yorkshire and Humber Infant and Children’s Transport Service.

“The partnership between specialist NHS transport teams, like Embrace, and the Children’s Air Ambulance charity continues to provide world class care to our sickest patients.”

Welcoming the arrival of the children’s charity to its new airbase, Robert Hough, Chairman of Doncaster Sheffield Airport (DSA), said: “We are delighted to welcome the Children’s Air Ambulance to its new base here at Doncaster Sheffield Airport and help them in their ongoing work to fly critically ill children to specialist care. We are proud to support this vital charity and the major impact it will have on saving children’s lives.

“It is an important part of our masterplan for the airport to act as a base for organisations like the Children’s Air Ambulance and we were pleased to work with them to bring their new headquarters for the North to DSA”

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