

Amanda Smith is a very sweet mother of three. She knew something was wrong when she was pregnant with her first child when she had to be hospitalised two months prior to the baby's due date.

She had preeclampsia, a serious condition of pregnancy, often characterised by high blood pressure and swelling, for which there is no cure except delivery of the baby and the placenta, and gestational diabetes, diabetes of pregnancy which often disappears after the baby is born. Those were both serious dangers to her life, and her baby was liable to have issues if he wasn't cared for quite intensively.

At Logan Hospital, they induced labour, which Amanda said was the hardest of her 4 children (well, 3 – one is on the way). It was a difficult time and when the baby came out – after 33 weeks and five days gestation (seven weeks premature), he wasn't breathing.

"They had to put a little oxygen mask on him and he was six pounds...I was scared. I didn't know what was happening."

Ultimately her little boy Brandon was OK. Amanda took him to The Benevolent Society's Browns Plains Early Years Centre. "I discovered the Centre on my own. I heard they had a nice nurse there, so I took Brandon there for baby check-ups." That nurse introduced Amanda to the Centre's Premmie group, a support group for parents of premature babies.

"I needed to know that other mothers went through the same thing I did. I liked hearing their stories and thought 'that's what I went through' ", said Amanda.

Brandon is now seven years old and in primary school. When he was two, Amanda became pregnant with her second child, son Aidan. Once again, Amanda developed preeclampsia and gestational diabetes, but she knew what to expect the second time around.

"It was the same story. Aidan was five weeks premature, but the people at Logan Hospital were terrific and they had my history so it was a different experience, although again, he was born not breathing and had to have a little oxygen mask."

But Aidan, now five, has had developmental delays and doctors are unsure as to whether it's related to his premature birth.

"He walked late - he was almost two years old," said Amanda, "and he has a few other issues. He had seizures early on and has had every test – an MRI when he was four days old, x-rays, all kinds of

tests but they can't tell me what exactly is wrong or whether these delays will remain. It's frustrating but I'm hoping he'll outgrow them." Aidan is now in prep in primary school.

Amanda fell pregnant with baby number three, Annabelle, now four. The same situation – premature delivery, same pregnancy conditions but this time the baby was only four weeks premature. Annabelle is fine now and starts school next year.

All through her experiences, she continued attending the preemie group at The Benevolent Society's Early Years Centre in Browns Plains - the Preemie support group and Preemie play group.

"I guess you could say I'm like the mayor of the place, I've been there the longest. But they know my history, as does the staff at Logan Hospital. It's very supportive having people who understand what you've been through."

Amanda is pregnant with baby number four, and it's early on so she's uncertain as to whether she'll have the same experience. "But there's no question – I will go back to Logan Hospital – I can't imagine what would have happened to me if I hadn't been there. I could have died. People still die in childbirth. With my fourth baby, I know exactly what might happen and at the Early Years Centre in Browns Plains, I know all the child health nurses and everyone else. I was so scared with the first baby – at least now I know what could happen."

Logan Hospital, Queensland Metro South Health and The Benevolent Society's Early Years Centre at Browns Plains held an event Thursday, 29 March 2018 to demonstrate the various services for premature babies and their parents. It was a celebration for people who've been part of the groups in the past and a welcome to new families.