

Poppyscotland News Release

SOLDIER WALKING 500 MILES TO FIGHT FOR DAUGHTER'S PLACE AT BLIND SCHOOL

Mac McGearey, a soldier based at Redford Barracks with 23 years' service, is walking 500 miles round Scotland to raise money to fund a place at the Royal Blind School in Edinburgh for his severely disabled 13-year-old daughter Ciara, while he attempts to fight a decision by the City of Edinburgh Council not to fund the placement.

When Ciara was just three days old she contracted meningitis, leaving her blind, unable to speak and suffering from a number of other disabilities. From the age of 6 months she received specialist care at Edinburgh's Royal Blind School but when Mac was posted to England his family had to move with him.

Despite the best efforts of Ciara's new school it was clear that her quality of life was deteriorating. When the family received a much-welcomed return posting to Edinburgh, the Council refused to fund the place.

An independent tribunal ruled that the Royal Blind School is best suited to provide the care Ciara needs but the Council has hired a prominent advocate to appeal the tribunal's decision at substantial cost to the taxpayer.

Mac and his family believe the Council is putting cost considerations ahead of Ciara's care needs and that he is being unfairly treated because of the nature of his job. As a serving soldier, he does not have a choice over where he is posted.

Mac said: "In the army you don't get to choose where or when you are posted. When an opportunity finally arose to return to Edinburgh, I happily took it and gave up a chance of promotion to move Ciara back to where we knew she could once again thrive. We knew the Royal Blind School was the only place that would provide the level of care she needs. She had been happy and had done well there and we were delighted at the prospect of her returning.

"We were stunned when the City of Edinburgh Council refused to renew funding for Ciara's place at the Royal Blind School. We were faced with two options – to allow the Council to dictate what was best for Ciara purely on financial grounds, or fund her schooling in the short term ourselves while we fight the Council's indefensible and uncaring position in court."

Veterans' charity Poppyscotland is supporting the family in its efforts to raise enough money to get Ciara the care she requires until the case is heard at the Court of Session. As well as providing fundraising and marketing expertise to help Mac on his walk, the charity is giving the family a grant of £5,000, which will fund a month's placement at the Royal Blind School for Ciara while Mac is doing the walk.

Poppyscotland Chief Executive Ian McGregor said: "This is clear instance of a family who need and are entitled to very specific support from the local authority. They are being disadvantaged because of Mr McGearey's military service. This is reprehensible and we are wholeheartedly behind the family and their campaign."

The McGearey family also has the support of their local politicians, Councillor Jason Rust, and MSP David McLetchie.

People wishing to support the 500 Miles for Ciara appeal should visit www.poppyscotland.org.uk/ciara where they can find out more, donate or sponsor Mac on his walk.

Mac's walk commences on Saturday 30 January and will take approximately one month to complete.

Ends

Media contact:

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Notes to Editors:

500 miles for Ciara Route

- a. **Phase 1.** Edinburgh to Falkirk via Union Canal.
- b. **Phase 2.** Falkirk to Milngavie via Forth and Clyde Canal.
- c. **Phase 3.** Milngavie to Fort William via West Highland Way.
- d. **Phase 4.** Fort William to Inverness via Caledonian Canal.
- e. **Phase 5.** Inverness to Rothiemurchus Lodge.
- f. **Phase 6.** Rothiemurchus to Braemar via Cairngorm Mountain Range.
- g. **Phase 7.** Braemar to Perth via Pitlochry.
- h. **Phase 8.** Perth to Dunfermline.
- j. **Phase 10.** Dunfermline to Edinburgh Castle via Forth Road Bridge.

Mac can be contacted on 07878 817900 during his walk

Poppyscotland

Poppyscotland supports more veterans and dependants in Scotland than any other veterans' charity. This is in two ways:

- Directly through financial assistance – last year we helped 1,424 individuals
- Indirectly by giving grants to veterans' organisations who specialise in veterans' issues, such as Combat Stress and Erskine. In the last five years we have given over £1 million to Erskine alone.

To find out more visit www.poppyscotland.org.uk