



I am soldier serving with the 1st Royal Tank Regiment and I've been in the army for 23 years. I'm now walking 500 miles across Scotland to raise funds for my daughter Ciara, who desperately needs specialist care. We have been badly let down by our local council who are putting costs before Ciara's care needs, a truly appalling decision which could have a devastating effect on her. All this is because, as a soldier, I was temporarily posted to an army base in England.

Ciara is now 13 but when she 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 wonderful specialist care at Edinburgh's Royal Blind School but I was subsequently posted to Suffolk, forcing my family to move South with me.

Despite the best efforts of Ciara's new school it was clear that her quality of life was deteriorating. As parents it was heartbreaking to witness. **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 Ciara needs. She had been happy and had done well there and we were delighted at the prospect of her returning.

On our return home to Edinburgh we were stunned when local council refused to renew funding for Ciara's place at the Royal Blind School. Instead they offered a place at an alternative school which does not specialise in care for the visually impaired.

An independent tribunal was set up to review our case and concluded unanimously that the Royal Blind School was the best option for Ciara. The tribunal recognised that if it were not for my job as a soldier, which required me to move away from Edinburgh in serving my country, Ciara would still be at the Royal Blind School in a place funded by the City Council. The Council were ordered to make the necessary funding available immediately.

After several weeks of inaction, we were told by the Council just days before Christmas that they were appealing against the tribunal's decision at the Court of Session. They had hired one of the country's top Advocates to fight their case, **at a cost of £7000 a day to the taxpayer.**

We were faced with two options – to allow the Council to dictate what was best for Ciara purely on financial grounds, or fund Ciara's schooling in the short term ourselves while we fight the Council's indefensible and uncaring position in court.

Poppyscotland have been swift in their support to us. Within days of contacting them they had committed enough money to get Ciara back into school immediately. Unfortunately there are many, many demands made on Poppyscotland's support and they can only fund this place for the month it will take me to complete my challenge.

That's why I'm walking 500 miles around Scotland to raise enough money to keep Ciara in school until the Court of Session hears our case. If, like me, you feel outraged by the Council's decision to abandon Ciara because I'm a serving soldier then please lend us your support. While our priority is to get the level of care that Ciara urgently needs, we are also fighting for the rights of all service families, who face difficulties like this because they choose to serve their country.

You can support 500 Miles for Ciara at www.poppyscotland.org.uk/ciara

Thank you,

Warrant Officer Class 1 Mac McGearey