

Letter from Chief Executive PoppyScotland



SCOTLAND'S ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY STILL NEEDS THE POPPY

By Ian McGregor, Chief Executive, Poppyscotland

This year has been one of significant military anniversaries and milestones, in particular the centenary of the First World War. Without a doubt, the war changed our world and our communities forever. Scotland punched above its weight in the war effort and, proportionally, lost more men than anywhere else in the UK. There was not a village, town or city left untouched by the war's devastating impact.

From this horror and destruction grew the poppy, both as the nation's collective symbol of Remembrance, and as a way to raise money to support those left destitute and with horrendous physical injuries and torturous mental scars. Although times have changed, the reality of modern-day conflict means Servicemen and women are still risking their lives in our names and there is still a real need to support those who have served, those still serving and their families. Problems can start for them on the battlefield, they might arise when making the transition to civilian life on leaving the Forces, or they might emerge years later.

Another important and very recent milestone has been the UK Forces' withdrawal from Afghanistan, after 13 years of combat operations. However, the demands placed on our Servicemen and women are by no means restricted to theatres of war. One only has to look at humanitarian efforts to tackle the outbreak of Ebola in Sierra Leone, involving British military medics, to see that serving in the Armed Forces can be hazardous in less obvious ways.

The aim of Poppyscotland is to address the problems faced by those in the Armed Forces community, by raising money through the Scottish Poppy Appeal, Scotland's biggest street collection. The poppy is unique in bringing the country together in a simple yet powerful act of Remembrance but, importantly, it changes lives by providing much-needed support to those who need it most.

Despite the continuing difficult economic environment, the Appeal raised £2.64 million last year, thanks to a wonderfully generous Scottish public. The impact of this support is huge. There are seven common areas that the Armed Forces community can struggle with; Poppyscotland uses money that the public donates to tackle these issues in ways that are both practical and carefully focused.

Tailored Support & Funding – Everyone's needs are different and these needs can change over time. That's why Poppyscotland's support is adapted to suit every individual's circumstances. The range of support is wide and can include helping with a train fare for a job interview, funding an essential home adaptation or a replacement battery for an electric wheelchair.

Advice – Knowing where to turn for advice when times get tough is the key to a better future. However, with so many different organisations out there, knowing where to start can sometimes be confusing. Poppyscotland puts those in the Armed Forces community in touch with the right people via its welfare centre in Inverness and the Armed Services Advice Project – a major collaborative project with other Service charities, delivered by the Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux.

Employment – One of the biggest challenges for those leaving

the military is getting a job. Finding suitable work can be difficult and transferring military skills to the civilian workplace is often a daunting prospect for Service leavers. Poppyscotland helps veterans find sustainable civilian careers by offering a range of services from re-training through to supporting those with mental health issues.

Mobility – Whether someone has suffered a battlefield injury, is experiencing a debilitating condition, has an existing injury which is worsening with time or is feeling the effects of getting older, Poppyscotland's mobility services help veterans live independently by providing occupational therapist assessments, home adaptations and mobility aids.

Respite – The military lifestyle can be tough, particularly for the families of Servicemen and women who are often left at home and can become isolated while a loved one is away on operational duties. A short break can make an enormous difference, both to serving families and to veterans and their dependants. Our Poppy Breaks provide much-needed respite for those who wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity.

Housing- Finding suitable housing is one of the biggest challenges facing people leaving the Armed Forces. Many go straight from school into the military so finding and keeping their own homes on their return to civilian life can be hugely stressful. Money from the Scottish Poppy Appeal funds home improvements and adaptations, as well as support to specialist housing organisations.

Mental Health – While most leave the Armed Forces in a good

frame of mind a significant minority experience mental health problems, which can include nightmares, flashbacks, isolation and insomnia. Poppyscotland works with other specialist organisations to fund and support services for veterans suffering from mental health difficulties.

Putting a donation in a poppy tin this November gives people an opportunity to remember and honour those who lost their lives but it also enables Poppyscotland to change lives for the better. Both history and continuing world events remind us that the Armed Forces community is likely to need the poppy for a long time to come.

To find out more about Poppyscotland and the Scottish Poppy Appeal visit www.poppyscotland.org.uk