

THE 'LITTLE BLUE HEROES' OF AN GARDA SÍOCHÁNA

The Little Blue Heroes Foundation has been providing practical and financial support to the families of children who have serious illnesses in Ireland since 2017, and also grants the wishes of the children it supports to become Honorary Gardaí to empower the child and foster positive engagement with An Garda Síochána, writes Karl Heller.

Established in 2017, the not-for-profit registered charity is operated entirely by volunteers, which includes Garda members, retired Garda members, their families, friends and civic-minded people from local communities.

While the charity has its own entity governed by the Charity Regulator, it is supported by An Garda Síochána and the Garda Commissioner. The name 'Little Blue Heroes' came about when it was found that the vast number of children it supports have a strong fascination with police uniform, equipment, vehicles, Garda units, etc.

This has even led some of the children to make a wish to become an Honorary Garda and be a part of the Garda family. As heroes to us with the battles they face, these children have become our 'Little Blue Heroes'!

Our Vision: The Little Blue Heroes Foundation's vision is to support families of children with serious illnesses in Ireland while empowering the lives of children through positive community engagement.

Mission Statement: The Foundation's mission is to provide practical and financial support to families of children who have serious illnesses in Ireland, while granting the wish of the children it supports to become Honorary Gardaí to empower the child and foster positive engagement with An Garda Síochána.

The charity provides the following services:

- * **Financial Support** – Providing essential financial support to families of serious and terminally ill children.
- * **Honorary Gardaí** – Granting the wishes of those children it supports by making them Honorary Gardaí which includes a ceremony, full uniform, badges, tours of a station etc.
- * **Police Themed Events & Toys** – Garda-themed events and police toys such as ride on mini-Garda vehicles, police Lego, police toy sets, etc...
- * **Project Haven for Heroes** – The charity brings families on holidays in Ireland who would not normally get a chance to go away, due to the severity of the child's illness or due to financial limitations from the family.
- * **Hospital Visits** – Members of An Garda Síochána visit children in hospital and provides support, a friendly chat and happiness for the children and their families.





*** Sarah's Christmas Gift** – Sarah Robinson, an exceptional young lady from Gorey, Wexford passed away peacefully in 2019, following a battle with childhood cancer.

Despite her illness Sarah Robinson was always thinking of others, particularly those younger than her. Before Sarah's passing her kindness and generosity showed no bounds as she nominated any donations that may come from her own funeral to be given in aid of 'Little Blue Heroes' to help families who have children with serious illnesses.

This is one of the most inspiring acts of kindness the charity has witnessed, which is why it matches Sarah's gift of €500 to all the 'Little Blue Heroes' families at Christmas in her memory. Sarah's Christmas Gift includes shopping vouchers for food, vouchers for toys and fuel vouchers 'Yule Fuel' for their cars to fuel the journeys to hospital appointments over the festive season.

Little Blue Heroes Foundation Goals:

- To identify, communicate and financially assist families of children who have serious illnesses in Ireland.
- To provide practical support and enhance community links to families of children who have serious illnesses in Ireland.
- To empower the children and create memories for families we support by fostering positive community engagement with An Garda Síochána.

Families Helped: Little Blue Heroes Foundation has Honorary Gardaí and their families it supports in every Garda Region throughout the country. The Foundation has inducted over 300 Honorary Gardaí since the charity's inception. It has made available and provided financial support to each of the families to ease the financial burden they often endure from many of the hidden costs when caring for their seriously ill child or children.

Fundraising: The charity receives no state funding and relies entirely on fundraisers and events organised by members of An Garda Síochána and supporters in the community to support the many families who need it. The charity has been very fortunate to have fantastic support of Garda members, retired members and people in the community who have fundraised for the cause.



How to Help Our Heroes: If you wish to support the work of the Little Blue Heroes Foundation or would like to organise a fundraiser, email info@littleblueheroes.org. To help the Foundation continue supporting families with children suffering from serious illness all donations can be made online at:

- Website: www.ifundraise.ie/littleblueheroes
- Paypal: info@littleblueheroes.org
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/fund/littleblueheroes/>

For further information visit www.littleblueheroes.org (Registered Charity Number 20158712, CHY Number 22275).

About the Author: Karl Heller, Retired Chief Superintendent at the Garda Bureau of Community Engagement, is the Chairperson of the Little Blue Heroes Foundation. His experience in child welfare and protection are reinforced by his academic study. His experience and knowledge played a significant role in being nominated and serving as a member of the original working group who developed the Children First child protection guidelines for Ireland.