

Conrad swaps the battlefield for the playing field

Conrad Craven is swapping the battleground for the playground as he leaves his life as a soldier behind him and trains to become a classroom assistant.

The 46-year-old father of two from Preston, who spent 22 years in the Army, is volunteering at his local primary school where his eight year old son, Thomas, is a pupil and, thanks to help and support from Next Step, the adult careers service, Conrad hopes to make a career out of it.

Conrad joined the 1st Battalion Kings Own Royal Border Regiment at Strensall, near York, as a junior soldier straight from school without any qualifications. He left the Army in 2004 and took some time out with his family during which time he discovered he had diabetes.

Conrad, who has seen active service in Northern Ireland and Bosnia and been stationed all over the world, enjoyed his time in the Army and up until now, has not found the transition into 'civvy' street an easy one.

But after help and support from his Next Step adviser Alistair Shimmin, he is now well on the way to realising his dreams. Having brushed up on his maths and English and started a classroom assistant qualification, Conrad is now thinking about studying science.

After talking with Next Step, Conrad realised he wanted a career in the classroom as he had done some teaching in the military – teaching new recruits about the weapons systems and also teaching his fellow soldiers to play the drums.

“I left school without any qualifications and now I’m on my way to becoming an Einstein,” he says. “I’ve taught 18 year olds how to use weapons before they go into conflict and never in a million years did I think I would ever be helping to teach children how to read and write.”

An accomplished musician, playing the drums, bugle, saxophone, flute and guitar to name but a few instruments, he has performed on the bugle at the Royal Albert Hall in front of Prince Philip.

“We have turned out some really good drummers over the years, so I started thinking about what I could do with teaching,” Conrad said. “My age was an issue and I knew I couldn’t afford to take years out to train as a teacher so it was my wife who suggested classroom assistant. I wasn’t sure at first but then I began to warm to the idea. I had enjoyed my time teaching in the Army.”

But it soon became clear to Conrad that he needed to go back to school himself after being turned down for a job as a classroom assistant because he didn’t have the necessary qualifications.

“When I left school, I didn’t have GCSEs in English or maths so at the age of 46, finding I needed to go back to school to get these was a bit scary,” he said. “My Next Step adviser Alistair was a great help. He advised me where I needed to go and what I needed to do. He was fundamental in helping me through and pointing me in the right direction”.

He approached his local primary school, St Andrew’s, where his son is a pupil, and they were happy to take him on.

Conrad has now gained a GCSE in English, a Level 1 qualification in maths and is aiming to get his Level 2 in July. He has also started the Level 2 Supporting Teachers in School programme, a 17 week course which will finish in July; Conrad is also planning to start a GCSE in science.

“Once I’ve got the qualifications I need, I’ll be looking for a job and if I’m lucky enough to get into a school, I’m aiming to take the Level 3 Classroom Assistant course which will mean that I will be able to stand in for the teacher in the classroom for short periods of time – and that’s what I really want to do.

“I’m really enjoying my time at St Andrew’s. It’s an excellent all round school, both for sporting and academic achievements, and I’m getting lots of valuable experience working with children right through from infants to Key Stage 2, reading, writing, drawing, and a whole lot more. My son is taking it all in his stride and I think he’s enjoying me being there.” He also coaches the school’s Under 7’s football team and his local junior football team at the weekends.

Conrad said Next Step was fundamental in helping him achieve what he has so far, by helping him to find the right courses and qualifications and with his CV.

“I didn’t find the transition from the Army very easy and while they did try to help, there just wasn’t the support like there is now with re-training. I feel really settled now. I know what I want to do with my life and I’m on the right course to achieve it.

“Each and every day is a new challenge, which is just how I like it. When I was in the army, every day was different. Give me a challenge and I’m happy.”

Conrad’s adviser Alistair said: “It is often a lack of confidence that stops people changing direction and for Conrad, it was his lack of qualifications that was holding him back. Once he realised what he wanted to do, I was able to guide him as to the steps he needed to take to achieve his ambitions.

“Next Step can help people overcome whatever barriers are stopping them achieving their ambitions and create a positive future by changing their lives, whether in their current job, by changing career or taking the first step on the career ladder.”

Next Step offers free and impartial careers and skills advice and is available online, over the telephone on 0800 100 900 and face-to-face with a local adviser.

Everyone can register online with 'My Next Step', a secure, personal online space where they can save CVs and action plans, assess their skills, find a suitable course and discover what other support, including financial assistance, could be available.

To find out how Next Step can help, you can:

- search online for Next Step
- call 0800 100 900 between 8am - 10pm, 7 days a week, for telephone advice or to make a face-to-face appointment at a location near you.

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Notes for Editors

Next Step is available to all adults in England, aged 19 and over (or 18 and over if a Jobcentre Plus customer), whatever their qualification, skill level or employment status, fuelling the potential of millions of adults, through three integrated service channels:

- Online: direct.gov.uk/nextstep
- Telephone: 0800 100 900, 8am – 10pm, 7 days a week
- Face-to-face: Call 0800 100 900 to arrange an appointment in your area

The service is also available, over the telephone, with bi-lingual advisers in the following languages:

Punjabi	0800 093 1333**
Sylheti	0800 093 1444
Somali	0800 093 1555
Urdu	0800 093 1118**
Gujarati	0800 093 1119
Polish	0800 093 1114
French	0800 093 1115
Farsi	0800 093 1116

Lines are open Monday to Friday, between 9am – 5pm. **Urdu and Punjabi lines are open 9am – 8pm

Careers services in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the devolved Administrations.

Skills Funding Agency

The Skills Funding Agency, an agency of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, funds and regulates adult further education and skills in England.

It is responsible for channelling funding swiftly, efficiently and securely to further education colleges and other providers, primarily in response to customer (employer and learner) choice



on programmes. It operates through customer focused services: National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and Next Step.

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