

Parents determined to see their daughter walk

\$52,000 needed for Keira to have life-changing operation

BY FIOMA AUDLEY

WHEN doctors told the Power family to get a wheelchair for their five-year-old daughter as she would never walk unaided, they refused to accept there was no other way and vowed to find one.

Now, 18 months later, Jason and Sally Power have uncovered an operation being performed in the United States which will allow little Keira Power — who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at 11 months — to regain full use of her legs and run and walk like any other little girl.

And determined dad Jason, whose parents hail from Keady in South Armagh and Monkstown in Co. Cork, is adamant that Keira will have the procedure — but must first channel his efforts into raising a whopping \$52,000 to pay for it.

He spoke to the devoted father this week to learn more of the family's Keira's Wish appeal, which aims to raise the vital cash. "Keira has cerebral palsy, and the form is spastic quadriplegia, which was diagnosed at 11 months," he explained.

"That is an unbelievably hard thing to be told about your baby and we didn't know what to think back then — it's such a sweeping condition we didn't know if it meant she would be in a wheelchair or unable to communicate.

"It has basically meant her limbs, arms and legs are very stiff and her muscles are constantly tense.

"She finds it difficult to use her hands in the same way as anyone else; she can feed herself and write and draw but she's not anywhere near the level she should be at that this age.

And she is not able to walk independently so she uses a Kaye walker, which is like a Zimmer frame with wheels."

As the years have gone by the Powers have been offered a range of temporary solutions for Keira's condition and extensive physiotherapy, but when told in November 2008 that they should put her in a wheelchair they could not bring themselves to give up on the hope of Keira walking unassisted.

"We were told by our consultant that we

should focus on putting Keira in a wheelchair — that was a real shock to us," Jason admits.

"We were thinking 'is this it, at age three and-a-half are we giving up hope?'"

"It's horrible to think your child will be in that situation, particularly when, apart from the walking, she is happy and healthy. And she does ask, 'why can't I walk and when will I walk?' so it was very difficult to hear."

Jason, an accountant, and Sally, a practice manager at a solicitors, hoped for an alternative.

Their prayers were answered a year later when the pair spotted a young boy with Keira's condition on a daytime television programme, who had undergone successful surgery in America to regain the use of his legs.

But although the operation, Selective Dorsal Rhizotomy (SDR), has a 100 per cent success rate, it is only performed in the USA and has a hefty price tag.



It also requires a month of physiotherapy for Keira in the States following the procedure meaning added costs for the Power family (who also have a 20-month-old son) as they would all need to make the trip.

But the Powers, who live in Portsmouth — where Jason moved to study and where they met — are determined that despite the cost, Keira will have the treatment.

Jason, who is from an Irish community in South Harrow, explained: "The procedure has a 100 per cent success rate; every child comes out of this better.

"We have been given the prognosis of independent walking for Keira after this and we are feeling very good about that being realistic.

"So although it is a vast amount of money there was never any doubt that we would go for it — it has to be done.

"I don't want to sit here at 60 saying 'well I paid off my mortgage but my child is in a wheelchair'; we will find the money some way."

And the Irish community across Britain is already showing their support for the Power family by donating cash and organising fundraising events to help them reach their goal — with their generosity proving something of a shock for the family.

"The fundraising is a step we need to do," Jason explains. "We are lost without it.

"But everyone has been so unbelievably good about it already and I have been really stunned by the help people are giving us."

He adds: "It's numbing when people offer you their help out of the blue like they have — but I am also not embarrassed about asking for it, as it's my child and there is nothing I would not do for her."

■ A fundraising race night is being organised by Barry Reilly of The Life of Reilly Pub in Harrow, in aid of the Keira's Wish Appeal next month. For further information about this or other future events, or on how to donate or get involved in the appeal, visit www.keirawish.org



Keira and her family, including brother Evin, pictured left, would have to spend a month in America after the operation while she undergoes intensive physiotherapy.



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