

# inSight


Magazine

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**NCBI**

Working for People  
With Sight Loss



## Three Weeks in the Life of a Blind Guy — Tony Murray's Covid-19 Experience

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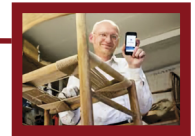
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Try your luck and spread the word about NCBI's NEW 'eye can' Weekly Lottery. Great Prizes!

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inSight

## NCBI inSight

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# Responding to people who are blind or visually impaired during Covid-19

Since the onset of Covid-19, like so many other organisations, we've had to significantly redesign how our services are structured and delivered to ensure we can stay connected and responsive to those we serve and support.

We understand how isolating social distancing is for everyone but people with sight loss live in a more tactile world than sighted people and the absence of human contact and touch can further exacerbate feelings of isolation.

## **Practical and emotional support**

We've had to replace all our face-to-face appointments with a range of supports offered through phone support or online. Our national helpline 1850 33 43 53 is busier than ever providing practical and emotional support from 8am-8pm. We've become more digital than ever having peer support groups meeting online, running technology tutorials on making technology more accessible and providing a suite of online resources to ensure continuity of upskilling people in independent living skills, education and training. All these developments will hold us in good stead into the future.

However, a looming threat to that future is the financial viability of the organisation.

Due to the State's persistent underfunding, NCBI has tirelessly stepped in to co-fund the

cost of service delivery by approx. €2.9 million year on year through our 116 charity shops and associated charitable fundraising income - both of which have been entirely wiped out by Covid-19.

## **Demand for these services will grow continuously**

NCBI remains steadfast in our commitment to providing services. Yet we know the demand for these services will continuously grow in the years ahead, as people continue to live longer and with age-related sight loss on the rise. So it is now imperative the HSE and next government provides adequate funding for our essential services.

A diagnosis of sight loss can affect anyone and the implications of it affects all aspects of your life. But imagine an Ireland where you receive this life-changing diagnosis and have no access to rehabilitative, emotional or social services and supports to allow you to adjust to your new life post-sight loss. Without swift action by the Government and the HSE, that could be the reality!

**Chris White**  
NCBI CEO

# Social Distancing is here to stay

Social distancing is becoming our new normal as the impacts of Covid-19 virus continues to affect our communities and everyday life. It is an effective way to help prevent the spread of the virus but maintaining a 2 metre distance is proving challenging for many people who are blind and visually impaired. Also as the impact of Covid-19 restrictions are easing and the streets become busier, it is a source of stress and frustration for people.

In reality, abiding by social distancing is almost impossible for a person who is blind or vision impaired, even with a guide dog — whose training doesn't include measurements or reading signage.

## Some of the challenges faced include:

- Being unable to judge distances, thus making self-distancing impossible.
- Being unable to see temporary markings to illustrate distance.
- Often being unaware of the existence of a queuing system, or where a queue begins or ends.
- Being unable to locate or read signage outlining the hygiene practices to be followed.
- Being unable to see protective screens.

NCBI is calling on the general public to step up and provide assistance and support to ensure that people who are blind and vision-impaired can actively engage in society in the weeks and months ahead. To aid the



public, NCBI would strongly encourage people who are blind and vision-impaired to always carry a long cane or a symbol cane when in public places to allow easy identification of a vision impairment.

## How the public can help:

- People should always afford a blind or vision-impaired person the required two metres distance in all circumstances.
- People should make their presence known before offering assistance, which many blind and vision-impaired people will welcome.
- People can offer verbal instructions which may be very helpful to the blind or vision-impaired person in certain circumstances — the key here is to always ask first.
- People should never just grab someone who is blind or vision-impaired in the belief that they are being helpful.
- When queuing outside shops, people should be careful not to block the path of someone who is blind or visually-impaired.

Following these simple tips will provide reassurance and assistance to people who are blind or visually impaired in a respectful way.

# The Blind Welfare Allowance and bureaucracy gone mad!

The Blind Welfare Allowance is a means tested payment made to people with significant vision loss or blindness. The rates are €60 per week for a single person and €120 per week for a blind couple, where both qualify for the allowance. The payment is mainly issued by cheque by local HSE offices, with only some offices permitting electronic bank transfer.



In April, NCBI published a media release urging the HSE to make the payment of this allowance available by electronic bank transfer for all recipients, both during the current COVID-19 and thereafter. It was nonsensical that one division of the HSE was issuing public health advice to stay indoors to slow the spread of COVID-19, yet another division within the HSE was forcing some blind and vision-impaired people to go out to the bank to access the payment, thereby putting themselves at unnecessary risk. Whilst other recipients who opted not to go out to cash their cheques were putting themselves in unnecessary financial hardship.

Why then has it taken a pandemic, and NCBI, to alert the HSE to the hardship caused by them sending cheques to people who live with mobility challenges? This is an especially

frustrating policy given the HSE know the recipients of the cheques will need to travel to a bank to deposit the cheque, and then wait for 3-5 days to access their payment when the funds have cleared. Moreover, the fact that individual HSE offices have the power to decide if the cheque can be substituted with an electronic payment is just unfair.

Thankfully since NCBI raised this issue a number of our service users across the country have been contacted and offered electronic payments which is very welcome. It is time to modernise how all payments are made and end any regional variations.

If you would like to receive the Blind Welfare Allowance by bank transfer please contact your local HSE office to arrange. Should any HSE office refuse to switch you to a bank transfer please email [campaigns@ncbi.ie](mailto:campaigns@ncbi.ie) and we will assist you.

## Unlocking the challenge of doing maths in Braille



Dr. Donal Fitzpatrick, DCU.

**For most people who are blind and use Braille, being taught maths was often a challenge as breaking down the concepts of algebra or fractions was difficult to do using Braille. As a result, completing higher level Leaving Cert maths in Braille is almost impossible.**

Donal Fitzpatrick, now a lecturer of computing in DCU, has been blind from birth and has experienced this struggle first-hand. Dr Fitzpatrick was inspired by his own experience to find a way to make maths more accessible to all Braille users. For the past 20 years, Donal has been working on research in the field of assistive technology and more recently been working on the EuroMath project. The aim of the project is to create barrier-free access to mathematics in a non-visual way.

Already, there is a worrying downward trend of students with vision impairments progressing onto 3rd level or further education. By making

complex visual material accessible, Dr. Fitzpatrick hopes this will destroy a lot of barriers for people. Lack of access is a huge problem across the board, NCBI's digital library platform Bookshare.ie is a fantastic initiative which is helping with this problem in most subjects. However, access is not such a quick fix when mathematics is involved. The teaching of maths subjects for blind students has been an issue for decades. EuroMath aims to improve the communication between students and teachers by creating a platform that will be accessible to all. Providing teachers with resources on how to describe visual concepts to a blind student. EuroMath allows every user to input and access information in their preferred format.

At the moment across the world, the way mathematics is taught for blind people is limiting when it comes to careers and job prospects. This is a barrier that should not exist and EuroMath is a step towards a level playing field for all students, allowing everyone to reach their full potential.

# Leaving Cert 2020 – to be or not to be!

The Leaving Certificate examinations are arguably the most important set of academic exams in a young person's life in Ireland. With the onset and spread of Covid-19 throughout the country, the uncertainty around how and when the exams would take place this year left all students who were due to undertake them with extra levels of stress and anxiety.

It has without doubt had negative effects on all students across the country, but what about students with additional needs? We checked in with two 6th year students with vision impairments, Patrick Hennessy from Waterford and Caitlin Heffernan from Tipperary, to find out what kind of impact this had had on them.

When the plan was to postpone the start date until July 29th, Patrick Hennessy said the extension would mean it is harder to stay focused but admitted it was best to have a date to aim towards.

Technology is a huge part of everyday life for Patrick and Caitlin. Despite the fact they have been using computers for school work from a young age, the move to all online classes has been a difficult transition. The constant use of the computer is tiring. Not only that but learning to use new websites and applications as well as studying for the exams has not been easy.

It is not all bad, as Caitlin tells us, because she has all her books on **textfile** on her laptop. While all her classmates were lugging dozens of



**Caitlin Heffernan, Leaving Cert student, Tipperary.**

books home for the lockdown, she didn't have to worry about it because they were accessible through her laptop.

The length of time taken to give clarity to students raised their fears over how they would manage. Would the usual exam accommodations such as a reader, separate centre and modified accessible papers be available? The final decision to cancel the exams in 2020 in favour of a calculated based system brought much needed clarity. Hopefully, it will enable Patrick and Caitlin and all those students look forward to the next chapter in their lives.

## NCBI's Local Advocacy Networks (LANs) Update — May 2020

2020 started well with four local advocacy network groups (LANs) established with meetings held in Limerick, Wexford, Cork and Donegal. Three further meetings were planned in April for Dun Laoghaire, Tallaght and NCBI's National Training Centre in Dublin, before the arrival of Covid-19.

The purpose of advocacy network groups is to bring people who are blind or visually impaired together to learn and use advocacy skills to campaign for improved access and participation in their local communities.

Following the government's implementation of restrictions during Covid-19 we have held regular advocacy network meetings online. This has meant everyone rising to the challenge of using online platforms — a new experience for many. It has also proved extremely worthwhile as members have provided invaluable feedback. This has led to our launching of a national advocacy campaign with members of our advocacy networks to raise awareness in the public domain about the unique challenges that social distancing restrictions poses for people with sight loss.

We are also working on an advocacy and campaigning skills training course which will be available to all NCBI service users who want to join and participate in a local advocacy network group. In the meantime, we will continue our online meetings until Covid-19 restrictions are lifted, when we will resume face- to-face meetings.

If you would like to join our National Advocacy Network and receive email updates on our campaigns and news of new local advocacy network groups in your area, send us an email, or phone with your details (name address and phone number) to [campaigns@ncbi.ie](mailto:campaigns@ncbi.ie) or **01-8821927**.

## Aniridia Day Webinars

Enjoy an afternoon of free, informative, online presentations and discussions about Aniridia on 21 June 2020 to celebrate annual international Aniridia Day.

We have fantastic speakers, plus time to ask questions and chat with people also affected by the rare genetic eye disease that causes visual impairment and increased sensitivity to light. Come together virtually on Zoom 2:00-4:00pm to support each other.

Agenda

- **Dry Eye Disease and Aniridia** — Colin Parsloe. Causes and treatments for the gritty sore eye sensation.
- **“But you don't look blind?”** Growing up with an invisible disability — Charles Bloch. Challenges and successes at university and finding jobs with aniridia.
- **Annual General Meeting 2020 of Aniridia Network** — Reports, financial accounts, questions and comments.
- **Achievements with Aniridia** — Sinead Kane. Becoming a lawyer, multi-marathon athlete and world record holder in Ireland with Aniridia.
- **Success at Aniridia Centre** — Dr Natella Sukhanovain. Creating an effective centre of excellence in Russia.
- **Open conversation for all attendees** Don't miss it. You can only take part if you register in advance at <https://aniridiaday.org/webinars-2020/>.

**We'll also be sharing information about the accessories, technology, people and animals that help us in life with Aniridia. Take part in the Aniridia Day group on Facebook or on Twitter and Instagram.**



# Sightless Cinema

Since 2015 Sightless Cinema has been delighting audiences who are blind and sighted, as they share an evening at the cinema, without pictures. They are drawn into a mesmerising world of surround sound — an unique listening events in the dark. It is professionally produced radio drama created with blind and visually impaired participants, and performed by group members.

Previous presentations have been held at Lighthouse Cinema and UCD Cinema, and for the past two years, at IMC Cinema Tallaght. Every year the group premieres original short plays, documentaries and a special live performance of a new radio drama. Ciarán Taylor is a theatre deviser who directs the project. He says 'It is rare to get a concentrated time to listen together these days, and the Sightless Cinema audience share a powerful experience of individual imagination, where the stories come to life in each person's head, and unlike at a film they are placed in the centre of the sound world, with voices and action coming from all directions — and it's great fun.'

Sightless Cinema was first commissioned by Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council in 2015, in partnership with the National Council for the Blind of Ireland. It moved to Dublin City and is currently funded by South Dublin County Council Arts Office, with recording facilities provided by Contact Studios at Rua Red Arts Centre, Tallaght. Previous participants have continued to create new work as members of White Cane Audio Theatre, with support from the National League of the Blind of Ireland and Fighting Blindness. In 2020 this group was awarded an Abbey 5x5 project, which allows



**Bernie Kenny and Paul Norton recording.  
Photo by Ciarán Taylor.**

them space and resources at the Abbey Theatre to work on a new live sound play 'In the Dark'.

New members are welcome — no experience is necessary. The groups meet weekly (eight months of the year) to create, perform and record the plays.

Due to Covid-19, a pilot planned in co-operation with Solstice Arts Centre, Navan, cannot go ahead. Some activity has moved online through conference calling — including the new Navan group, with support from Meath County Council Arts Office.

Audiences have said it is: 'Powerful, moving, hilarious'; 'Fantastic way to experience what people with sight loss 'see', hear and experience on a day-to-day basis'; 'The plays were hilarious but also spooky, unsettling, thought provoking and informative.'

What participants have said about the experience: 'Fantastic, blown away. Can't wait to go again'; 'Made great friends through the programme —very strong sense of camaraderie'; 'It was life changing for me'; 'I'd do it again a hundred times over'.

**Contact: Ciarán Taylor  
whitecaneaudiotheatre@gmail.com for more  
information.**

## Three Weeks in the Life of a Blind Guy –

### **Tony Murray, Senior IT architect and member of the Group Board of NCBI, shares his Covid-19 lockdown experience in Spain.**

I am a 40-year-old blind person, working as a Senior IT Architect in the Central Bank of Ireland. It is a busy and challenging career, but somewhere amongst all of my commitments to the Central Bank, I find time to serve as a Director on the Group Board of the NCBI. Things are going pretty well for me, and I rarely have cause to stop and reflect on the fact that I am blind; like many people, I have adapted to life and work, and it all just feels normal — until recently, that is! As is the case for people all over the world, the past few months have been eventful and changeable for me. This is a brief insight into what I have been up to, and how I have been adapting to the ‘new normal’.

My partner and I are busy people, so we make sure that we take time out periodically to enjoy our holidays. I consider these as ‘reboot’ sessions, where I can get away from the somewhat chaotic nature of my life and have time to think about nothing. We were scheduled to visit our favourite winter sun destination Puerto de Mogán in Gran Canaria in early March. Naturally, we were concerned about what was the developing nature of the

worldwide COVID-19 crisis at the time.

However, following consultation with experts in the area, we decided to take our holiday. In early March when we were scheduled to leave, there were no restrictions and airports were open; COVID-19 still felt like it was a bit away.

Everything about our break in Gran Canaria was as we have come to expect and love. Beautiful sunshine, lots of relaxation, delicious food and ice-cold beers. We were keeping an eye on the news from home, growing more and more concerned each day. There were no cases at all reported on Gran Canaria at the time though, so we felt relatively safe — in fact, we joked that we could be more safe on the island as opposed to being back in Dublin.

On the last day of our holiday, which was 14 March, we spoke to some people from the UK. Their flight had been cancelled, which really set off alarm bells for us. My phone never left my hand as we travelled to the airport, and up until about 3 PM, everything seemed fine. On arrival at the airport though, it was clear there was a problem. We were informed that our flight was cancelled, and that we would be taken to a hotel. I am not afraid to admit it; I panicked. There was absolutely no information available to us in terms of a rescheduled flight. As is the Irish way though, we met up with a group of fellow would-be air passengers in the airport who, too, were wondering how they would manage to get back to Ireland given the cancellations. After a couple of hours, a bus showed up and we were herded on

## y — Tony Murray's COVID-19 Experience

to it, all of us only knowing that we were headed for a hotel for an indefinite amount of time. One of the handling agents in the airport quipped with us when we were asking for an update that it could be a day, it could be two days, or it could be a month — unhelpful I thought! Anyway, I began to feel a little better, knowing that we were amongst our fellow Irish, and that everyone was in the same situation regarding a lack of information. The bus dropped us off at what proved to be a very fine hotel in Las Palmas.

Everyone checked in, and two other couples and ourselves — who were complete strangers — decided it would be a good idea to get together, go out, find some food, and have a few calming drinks! This we did, and the world really did feel a lot less frightening after some nice steaks and a couple glasses of wine.

Our little group of strangers agreed to keep close throughout our extended stay on Gran Canaria, and to exchange any information we could gather in terms of a flight home. There was complete radio silence for twenty-four hours from Aer Lingus though, so all we could rely on



**Tony Murray, Senior IT architect.**

was speculation and rumours coming out about airport closures, full lockdowns, and a notion that we may have to stay on Gran Canaria indefinitely. Not good!

The following evening, I received an email to tell me that we were going to be brought home on a 'rescue flight' at around 6:20 PM the next day. The sense of relief I had was indescribable!

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What could we do? We met up with our new stranded friends and went straight to the hotel bar for a celebratory drink. In our defence, there was little else to do in the admittedly plush surroundings of a hotel in the middle of a fully locked down city (the police were on the streets with loud hailers telling everyone to get back inside). Anyway, as the word of the 'rescue flight' spread, people suddenly began to find their cheer, knowing there was finally a resolution to our issue, and we were all getting home the following day.

On Monday 16 March, we arrived back into a very different Ireland compared to the one we left nine days previously. The following day was the standard post-holiday domestic whirlwind of unpacking and laundry. Next day, Wednesday, marked the beginning of our — what is now — 'new normal' way of working.

As I said, I work for the Central Bank in IT Architecture. While I was off soaking up winter sunshine, the Bank had been very proactive in terms of setting staff up to work from home on an extended basis. I have the option of working from home when necessary for a day or so here and there, but obviously the COVID-19 emergency dictated this would be an ongoing situation — and it still is!

My job requires significant collaboration with both IT and Business stakeholders in the Central Bank. In addition, as an architect, it is necessary for me to derive designs and create architectural documentation for various — what tend to be — mission critical IT solutions, which

enable the Central Bank to deliver on their mandate. Much like a lot of people who are now working from home on an ongoing basis, executing my role involves using my laptop to dial in to work via the Central Bank's VPN, and carrying out all meetings via WebEx.

Luckily, technology did not prevent me in any way from adapting to this new way of working; in fact, it was a great enabler. My laptop is running screen-reading software, and accessing the VPN is seamless. I tend to dial in to WebEx meetings via the landline in my house, as I find it easier than using the software solution on my laptop to do so. I thought about getting rid of my landline for so many years, I am very glad that I never got round to it! Therefore, from a technology perspective, I am fully enabled thanks to the Central Bank's superb infrastructure to facilitate working remotely, and my adaptive software.

Technology aside, like most I am sure, I dearly miss the social interaction and normality of the way I worked prior to the COVID-19 crisis. Being at home all the time is mentally challenging in so many ways, and I find it difficult to come to terms with the possibility this might go on for quite a bit longer. However, I try to stay positive and resilient through regular communication with my family, friends and work colleagues. Even though we are physically distant, I think it is important to foster a sense of togetherness as we all face down these new challenges and look to a future when normality can be restored.

## NCBI Gerard Byrne Bursary – Apply Now!

NCBI would like to warmly congratulate our Gerard Byrne Bursary graduates for 2020:

- **Emma Kearns**, graduating from Trinity College with a Bachelor of Occupational Therapy.
- **Aidan Miskella** graduating from UCC with Bachelor of Computer Science.
- **Niamh Kavanagh** graduating from DCU with a Bachelor of Global Business (France).
- **Marianna Watchthorn** graduating from Trinity College with a Bachelor of Arts (Irish and Philosophy TSM).



**Emma Kearns, NCBI Bursary recipient.**

We caught up with Emma about her experiences in college and how the bursary helped support her during her degree.

“I was the lucky recipient of the NCBI Gerard Byrne Bursary in 2018, and the funding I received through the bursary enabled me to live on-campus for my final two years of college.

This not only allowed me to study with greater ease, but also afforded me the opportunity to engage more in the all-important social aspects of university life. As well as this, knowing that the team at NCBI were always available to support me made college appear to be less daunting and greatly reduced stress and anxiety. Overall, the bursary made my time at university as uncomplicated, relaxed, and enjoyable as possible and I am incredibly grateful to all of the team at NCBI for enabling me to have such a positive experience of college.”

Following graduation, Emma is looking forward to beginning her career as an Occupational Therapist. NCBI is proud to support students like Emma and is pleased to announce the Gerard Byrne Bursary is open for applications for the 2020 – 2021 academic year.

The annual bursary is for students with a vision impairment entering or currently in full-time third level education. The bursary is awarded to the value of €1,500 per annum for the duration of their undergraduate degree. Subject to the impact of Covid-19, NCBI may offer a 6-month internship to one bursary recipient annually, helping the student to gain work experience to further prepare for employment.

**Application forms are available via the NCBI website, and close at 5pm August 31st 2020. For more information or if you have any questions, please contact [bursary@ncbi.ie](mailto:bursary@ncbi.ie) .**

# Importance of lighting when you have low vision

Have you ever considered the importance different aspects of light plays in assisting those living with low vision to do everyday things? Lighting should always be appropriate for the individual's needs be they orientation, movement or tasks. Here are five areas of lighting for you to consider to improve your ability to undertake daily tasks.

## 1. Even Lighting

Many people with vision impairment find it difficult to cope with glare or extreme variations in light level and often take time to adjust to different lighting levels. For example, some people would find it difficult to adjust to a dark entrance hall on a bright day.

Lighting should be evenly distributed at a level that is comfortable throughout a person's home and between rooms and outdoors with no dramatic changes from one area to another. This can be achieved by ensuring you have enough lumens in your bulb to meet your needs, paint the walls in light colours using a matt finish paint, clean shades regularly and ideally use globe style shades as they help distribute light evenly.

## 2. Daylight

Natural daylight can be maximised by ensuring window sills are not obstructed by large objects e.g. vases or net curtains or other curtains not being fully drawn back. Externally windows can be blocked by vegetation. It is also important to



keep windows clean. Direct sunlight can cause harsh shadows and glare that may be uncomfortable and make vision more difficult. Horizontal or vertical blinds are the best way to reduce glare and control daylight.

## 3. External Lighting

External lighting at the approach to a building should clearly highlight and define the entrance area. Good lighting design will help people identify the entrance from a distance during the hours of darkness. These can include sensor lights which are good to provide automatic lighting when you approach your home or highlighting the sides of pathways with luminescent materials or LEDs that can be seen at night which will make the route easier to follow.

The level of external lighting around an entrance should be considered in conjunction with the internal lighting to provide a gradual transition for people entering or exiting a building. Sharp

## Volunteering during Covid-19

changes in the level of illumination can cause discomfort for some people.

### 4. Task Lighting

Task lighting can supplement general illumination. They are cheap to run, keep cool and give a good bright light which can be adjusted to avoid glare.

Day light colour bulbs (available from NCBI equipment shop) offer a whiter more natural light. Fluorescent ceiling lighting with additional task lighting around each area of activity, for example, over the cooker, over the worktop and sink or over the electric kettle, may be best. Light from lamps or fixtures should be positioned directly onto the task (for example, food being prepared etc.).

Stick up and clip-on lighting can also help to put the light exactly where it is needed. It is also important to remember that only using lamps will lead to uneven lighting.

Whatever the lighting arrangement in the room, as task lighting is increased, so should the surrounding room lighting. Avoid using a very bright lamp in a dark room. Care must be taken to reduce glare and reflection from shiny surfaces.

Task lighting must be shielded from shining directly into the eye. Bare bulbs are a source of glare. Lampshades and light fittings should be chosen carefully to ensure lighting is evenly distributed throughout a room without glare.

**NCBI's Community Resource Workers can answer all your queries on how to maximise light in your own setting.**



**Covid-19 Volunteer, Shirley Healy and her guide dog Nitro.**

NCBI service user Shirley Healy has been busy listening, supporting and encouraging hundreds of vulnerable people during Covid-19. Shirley, a regular volunteer in Cork-based organisation **Friendly Call**, has increased her time volunteering to five days a week, making daily phone calls to those living alone and are elderly, or have a disability or chronic illness.

“These daily calls have increased since Covid-19 due to the closure of day centres so it is really important that we check in on these vulnerable people and be able to listen to how their day is going and if they need advice or anything. I never know what response I’ll get as everyone’s situation is different, some calls only last a few minutes while others are much longer if the person needs to talk.”

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“I get a lot from volunteering with **Friendly Call**, I enjoy the social aspects with colleagues and giving back to those who need support. As a result of doing this voluntary work, I completed a Diploma in Mental Health and Community in UCC and have found this has helped significantly especially for those callers that require emotional support,” said Shirley.

Shirley is blind and has been involved with NCBI since childhood availing of mobility training, on-line technology tutorials and also participates actively in the weekly peer support group.

**For more information about Friendly Call, please call Brenda 087 6366407 or 021 4301700.**

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## **Fundamentals and Importance of Unified English Braille (UEB)**

Braille is an ingenious tactile reading and writing tool for people who cannot access print information. Unified English Braille, (UEB) is but one of many variants of this code where raised dots are used to represent the letters of the alphabet, the full Braille Cell consists of six dots arranged into two columns of three dots, similar to the six dots on a dice, UEB not only consists of the twenty-six letters of the English language, it also consists of symbols that denote punctuation, mathematics and scientific, and foreign language characters, music and computer notations. Braille is not a language, it is a code or script, by which all languages can be written and read. Braille gives crucial literacy



skills to people who are blind or visually impaired. It is also a means by which people with sight loss are made aware of the many attributes in written documents, for example spelling, punctuation, paragraphing and other necessary formatting considerations.

Braille is used by people who are blind and deafblind. It is also important to people who are vision-impaired. Braille provides the ability to acquire alternative literacy skills, while providing individuals with intellectual freedom, independence, and ever-increasing equal opportunities with regard to self-advancement, professional study and employment opportunities. Braille can also be learnt by people who can see and who may support individuals who are blind, for instance parents, teachers and various types of support staff.

It can be found in many public spaces, on lift buttons, used alongside print on various types of transport, in more and more restaurants in the form of menus, on medicinal products, and on certain household products. Braille is used in everyday communication — for identification purposes, for labelling, notetaking, accessing important information. The use of Braille is endless, the importance of this tactile code is hugely significant in the lives of people with sight loss.



# Iona Resource Centre

Engage

Enable

Empower

## Corona Fear? We Are Still Here!

Covid-19 has been a scary time for many, impacting on all aspects of life. We recognise the feelings of isolation and loneliness can be increased in these challenging circumstances and we've developed our service to ensure we can still meet our service users needs.

### **Reactive Response:**

NCBI's Iona Resource Centre (IRC) based in Glasnevin, Dublin has developed its services to meet the new challenges that Covid-19 has presented, by offering a "Meals on Wheels" service for those who are cocooning and are most vulnerable. IRC staff members Tracy Bailey and Sandra Wynne prepare fresh, nutritious meals daily to support our service users; which have been described as "a lifeline in these terrible circumstances". We have worked with Vantastic who provide and support our day service transport needs. Vantastic is a social enterprise that offers accessible transport to people with mobility, physical and/or sensory needs in Dublin. In continuing to work in partnership we have provided a vital service to service users.

Additionally, we have been providing welfare calls to all of our service users weekly to ensure they are safe, well and supported. We take time to chat, listen and see how we can assist if anyone is needing some additional support. We have dropped out some Creative Crafts Activity Bags to those who may wish to partake in some



**L-R: Tracy Bailey, kitchen supervisor and Sandra Wynne general assistant in the Iona Centre Kitchen.**

crafting activities. We have provided enlarged instructions and audio recording, where required, to help engage people in some creative activities.

With the uncertainty surrounding when the Iona Resource Centre will fully reopen (dependent on the HSE National Guidance), we have now developed a Virtual Timetable which offers x3 sessions per day via Zoom. This has proved a huge success, with individuals connecting in with their friends whilst gaining support and learning from our qualified staff team delivering classes. Sessions currently on offer include Boxercise, Pilates, IT, Book Club and Mindfulness.

The Iona Resource Centre will continue to diversify its service offer to ensure that our service users are fully supported during this pandemic.

**If you would like further information about the Iona Resource Centre, please do not hesitate to contact Day Services Manager Maggie Richardson on 01 8304014 or [Maggie.richardson@ncbi.ie](mailto:Maggie.richardson@ncbi.ie) .**

# Personal Grooming

We all like to look our best. Here are some tips and techniques for organizing your bathroom and dressing area or practicing your make-up routine.

## Organisational Tips

1. Ensure you have good lighting in the bathroom and introduce task lighting over the sink if possible.
2. Consider installing wall mounted magnifying mirror.
3. Use towels and facecloths in colours that contrast with the background, blue towel against a white wall.
4. Soap and all items should be in a consistent location, soap in a contrasting colour or using liquid soap can help make it easier to locate it.
5. Group frequently used hygiene items together on a shelf or in a basket.
6. Using different shaped containers can be helpful to make them easier to identify OR use rubber bands, hair bands, tape, or tactual markers to attach to bottles, containers, tubes and toothbrush to distinguish them e.g. 1 elastic band = shampoo; 2 elastic bands = conditioner; 3 elastic bands = shower gel
7. A talking bathroom scale can help keep track of your weight.

## Applying Make-Up

### Preparation:

1. Ensure you have good lighting and consider introducing additional task lighting.
2. Consider using a hand held



magnifying mirror or alternatively use the camera on your smart phone to zoom in on your face.

3. Prepare the work space, wash hands and brushes to prevent infection.
4. Protect your clothing by using a make-up cape or large old shirt or towel which you can put over your clothes to protect clothing from being stained while applying makeup.
5. Protect your hair from any make-up by wearing a hairband.

### Application:

The following is a practical list of tips for you to consider:

1. Seek expert advice on the colour/shade of make up most suited to your skin tone. This is a free service and staff are normally more than willing to provide advice on colour and application.
2. Cream or liquid products may be easier as you don't get any fallout and easier to control

the quantity. You can apply with your fingers or beauty blender.

3. Use tinted moisturizer or CC cream, these have good coverage but can be lighter and easier to apply.
4. Use a beauty blender to apply foundation/concealer as this helps prevent streaks.
5. Counting the number of brush strokes or drops of foundation or moisturiser is a good way to be consistent in your application routine.
6. Use smaller size (travel size) make-up brushes. The shorter handle means that you can get closer to the mirror.
7. If it is safe for you to use eye make-up use clear mascara this highlights the eye lashes but avoids any obvious dark smudges.
8. Use liquid blusher, it may be difficult to judge the amount of blusher on a brush where as with liquid it is easier to control the amount of colour, eg 3 drops of liquid blusher for each cheek.
9. If you use lip liner, hold the lip pencil as close to the point as possible for better control. Nude or neutral shaded may be easier to start with – seek professional advice to choose colours to suit your skin tone.
10. Lip gloss can be applied with the finger. You can also use a clear or lightly tinted lip gloss in place of lipstick.

### **Result: Looking and feeling gorgeous!**

Ask for help, speak to your Community Resource Worker about any issues you are having. They are not qualified beauticians but they may be able offer some tips and hints.

## **NCBI Athy – 20 years in the business with 3 amazing volunteers**

When NCBI Athy opened its doors on 4th April 2000, volunteers Nan Hopkins, Maura Doran and Angela Hunter came on board to help the then



manager Sean Rusk. Fast forward to 2020 and these three amazing ladies are still going strong. Nan is our oldest at 85 years young and has worked in retail since she was 14 years old. She retired from work at 65 but then started volunteering. Maura is the backbone of the shop, keeping the finances and manager on her toes. Angela joined along with her mam Mary Whelan who has sadly since passed away but worked at NCBI until she lost her sight many years ago.

Angela is an all rounder and always available at short notice to help out. Nan says the shop has changed a lot over the years, the fashion trends, the layout plus the introduction of online advertising have all improved sales. These ladies have given their all to NCBI Athy making it the success it is today. As the manager, it has been my pleasure for the last six years to work with and learn from these three wonderful ladies also not forgetting the rest of the great team but having Nan, Maura and Angela here since the shop opened is an amazing achievement.

— **Mary Lawler (Shop manager).**

## NCBI Furniture Warehouse in Kylemore, Ballyfermot, Dublin



NCBI is delighted to celebrate the further expansion of its retail chain with its first dedicated Furniture Warehouse selling quality second-hand furniture of all kinds.

Opening this store is a fantastic step forward for NCBI and is in response to the high demand for second-hand furniture. Already a number of our stores sell furniture and clothing combined but this is the first warehouse space we have dedicated to furniture.

NCBI is proud to play a part in promoting environmentally friendly practices through reusing and recycling. So by supporting our shops, customers not only generate funds for our services but also support our drive for more sustainable fashion and furniture.

**We urge shoppers to pop in and see what is on offer but also to feel free to donate any unwanted furniture items. We also provide a collection service. All donations are gratefully received. Telephone 087 715 8094.**

## NCBI and Thriftify partnership offers opportunity to shop online

The temporary closure of NCBI's 117 stores during Covid-19 presented the opportunity to start selling some of our quality stock online through a partnership with Thriftify.



Thriftify is a social enterprise web-based platform designed specifically for the charity retail sector with all profits reinvested to improve the platform. Using this platform, NCBI has uploaded hundreds of its top pieces.

NCBI was one of the first charities to begin working with Thriftify, initially selling books and other small items so it's great to now be able to sell our fashion as well. While it's still only a small percentage of what's available in our stores, we want to let people know that they can still support our work and get a bargain at the same time.

The partnership was a new venture for Thriftify too as up to now, they've only focused the technology on items that are barcoded. Fashion is a new area. But with the correct digital technology it enables retailers, who would have typically just relied on the customers walking in the door for sales, to broaden their reach to the global market. It makes retailers more resilient.

The current operation, based in the NCBI's warehouse in Naas, is following all government guidelines regarding social distancing. All of the items have been steam-cleaned and many are brand new. Customers seeking to buy items can do so by visiting [https://bit.ly/NCBI\\_Fashion](https://bit.ly/NCBI_Fashion).

## Through the Eyes of Another: An Interview with Hans Jørgen Wiberg

Be My Eyes is a mobile app that connects people with sight loss with volunteer helpers from around the world via a live video chat. Here the app's founder Hans Jørgen chats about how he came up with idea for the app, how it became so popular, and what the future holds for Be My Eyes.



### Q1. What was the original inspiration behind Be My Eyes?

Doing my work in the blind community in Denmark, I met a lot of fellow blind people and got to know the daily issues facing many low vision and blind people, especially people living alone, and it was in this period I came up with the idea of Be My Eyes.

### Q2. When was the first time you realised your application had become a success?

Depends on how you measure success, but I clearly remember the moment I could see two people from Japan talking to each other and solving an issue in a language I didn't understand. That's the moment we proved it was possible to harness the generosity of people all over the world and help people in any country.

### Q3. Can you share with us some of the best and most unique ways in which Be My Eyes has been used by someone who is blind or vision impaired?

Most people use Be My Eyes while cooking, sorting mail or finding lost items on the floor – but a guy in Sweden lost track of his self-driving lawnmower and used Be My Eyes to find it again. We have blind computer gamers who sometimes need a little eyesight, we had a

retired electrician who needed help to get the colours right etc. But most important you can make a 15 second call just to make sure you have set your washing machine on the right programme or temperature setting.

### Q4. Be My Eyes has partnered with big organisations such as Microsoft and Google to offer extended support to the sight loss community. Any plans to partner with other organisations, maybe Apple?

We are open to bring new companies that are relevant to our users onboard. We have just partnered up with RNIB, Galloways, and ACB and Lighthouse San Francisco in the US. We hope to bring Apple onboard as well.

### Q5. What do you hope the future of Be My Eyes will be?

We have many projects in the works. But right now I am excited about Be My Eyes partnering with Global Citizen to provide audio description for the massive WHO concert with Stevie Wonder and Andrea Bocelli among many others. I really hope we can do more events like that because I know we can make it totally accessible, we can give you your own friendly virtual Be My Eyes volunteer to watch the show together with you and you don't even have to offer them a coffee.



**NCBI Labs is the technology department within NCBI and offers a number of services to people with sight loss:**

- Technology Support Line
- Technology Sales for Mainstream and Assistive Technology
- Technology Training
- Technology Live Events
- Virtual Technology Clubs

If you have any question or need any technology support, please contact NCBI Labs on **1850 92 30 60** or email [labs@ncbi.ie](mailto:labs@ncbi.ie).

### **Technology Live Events**

During the Covid-19 Crisis we have been running a weekly Technology Live Event on topics that will support you. All events are recorded and added to YouTube for you to listen in afterwards. To listen back on the previous events you can check out the NCBI Live Events YouTube Playlist.

NCBI Labs Live Events are also hosted on Apple Podcasts, Google Podcast, Spotify and TuneIn. Please subscribe and give us a listen on your favourite device.

### **NCBI Labs Email Alerts**

NCBI Labs can send emails to alert you to NCBI Live Events, Tech news and other items of interest. If you wish to subscribe to this mailing list please visit <http://www.ncbi.ie/ncbi-labs-email-alerts/>

## **NCBI Eyes Online initiative**



Having access to technology to ensure people could stay connected

became very apparent during the Covid-19 lockdown when people were cocooning or restricted from seeing their family or friends outside the 2km and 5km radius.

However, while technology is an enabler the costs associated can be prohibitive for many of our service users. That's why NCBI launched its Eyes Online initiative which is a call for donations of old or disused laptops or other hardware that can be repurposed to ensure all children and adults who are blind or visually impaired has access to technology they need to help them live more independently and stay connected with family and friends.

NCBI Labs will wipe clean the old laptops or hardware and reconfigure them for our service users. These laptops can then be bought by our service users for a nominal fee of €50 as well as guaranteed ongoing technology support to them from NCBI Labs. The reconditioned laptops will have a working camera and all key accessibility features on mainstream software activated for ease of use.

In general, NCBI will accept most laptops, monitors, webcams and tablet devices that are younger than seven years including the following:

- A Laptop PC that is running Windows 7 or newer
- A Mac Laptop that was released in 2012 or later
- iPad and tablets that were released in 2012 or later

- Webcams
- Keyboards and Mouse
- Monitors larger than 17 inches
- An iPhone 6 or later
- An Android phone running Android 5 or later.

Things to consider when donating equipment:

- The device must power on and have the accessories included such as chargers, software keys etc
- Company devices or a device with encryption must be disabled
- The device should have a working webcam & microphone
- The screen should not be damaged and be working.

If you or your friends or company has recently upgraded your equipment and you'd like to donate the old one simply send an email to [info@ncbi.ie](mailto:info@ncbi.ie) or call our helpline **1850 33 43 53**.

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## NCBI Labs Braille Support Group

NCBI Labs have recently commenced an exciting project in relation to Electronic Braille Devices to build on the support service offered and compliment the wide range of technology that is supported already by NCBI Labs.

The project focuses on Electronic Braille Devices currently being used, identifying if the devices are being used to their potential, create a resource that staff can access to resolve common issues that arise and helps keep everyone up-to-date with new developments in the world of Braille. If you feel there is any Braille related topic that should be considered for inclusion in this project please email [labs@ncbi.ie](mailto:labs@ncbi.ie).

## Have some fun with your Smart Home Technology



**We bring you some quick tips to try out on your smart speaker.**

Feel like taking some time out to relax? Try saying the wake word Alexa or Hey Google, “help me meditate”. Your smart speaker will reply with some guided meditations and you will be helped through the process step by step.

For a little fun you could ask your smart speaker “What’s my horoscope?” It will respond with “what is your zodiac sign?”, and once you let it know (for example Taurus) it will start to read out your horoscope for that day.

Finally, if you are working from home at the moment and you need some background sounds to help you concentrate, then just say “Alexa start office sounds”. This gives you an unobtrusive atmosphere just as if you were surrounded by colleagues in the office. Of course, there is many other ambient sounds available such as wind chimes and waterfall sounds, just ask Alexa.

# Big Prizes and excitement are in store with the launch of a new NCBI national draw

The Eye Can Weekly Lottery commenced on 2nd June and will operate weekly thereafter.

“The Eye Can Lottery is a positive statement at this time,” says Joe McKenna Head of Foundation. “It suggests that we can achieve much and overcome sight loss as a barrier to education, employment and participation in society.”

## **Extensive Support Structure**

The Eye Can Lottery will support NCBI’s efforts to offer training and work placement to blind and vision impaired people. “We have an extensive support structure in place throughout Ireland — but the challenge of securing work means that every candidate may require mentors, specialist training, the right technology and even support with transport and accommodation,” says Mr McKenna. This is what the Eye Can Lottery will fund.

The weekly prize fund is a minimum of €200. Throughout the year, special prizes, holidays and promotions will be offered to add additional excitement. The Foundation team hope to live stream some of the draws each Tuesday at noon

The logo for the Eye Can Weekly Lottery is displayed on a dark blue rectangular background. The word "eye" is written in a large, lowercase, yellow sans-serif font. Below it, the word "can" is written in a smaller, lowercase, white sans-serif font. Underneath "can", the words "WEEKLY LOTTERY" are written in a yellow, uppercase, sans-serif font, flanked by two yellow stars on each side.

on Facebook and to use it as an opportunity to connect with people.

The weekly entry is €2 and can be paid online at [www.donate.ncbi.ie](http://www.donate.ncbi.ie) by a direct debit of €8.80 per month. Tickets are also available for purchase in NCBI charity shops nationwide. Retail customers will receive a tear-off receipt which is redeemable at face value for each purchase over €20.

Anyone wishing to enter the draw can call the Foundation team on **1850 33 43 53** for automatic entry. Results will be published weekly on [www.donate.ncbi.ie](http://www.donate.ncbi.ie) .

**Lottery players must be over 18 years; and entries are limited to the Republic of Ireland. Staff and volunteers are eligible to enter. (Licence No: 000954)**