

# inSight

Magazine

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NCBI

Working for People  
With Sight Loss

**Amelia Cavallo, with white cane in hand, a member of the ExtraOrdinary Bodies Circus group, rides the revolving circus tombola during the Carlow Arts Festival see story on pages 12/13.**





Facilitator, parents and children on Summer Camp — see story on pages 16/17.

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**Make your Pledge to ClearOurPaths!**



**NCBI inSight**

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# SIGHTLINES

## The Luas Cross City Line — 14 new stops

Fiona Kelty, our Access and Awareness Coordinator, has been assessing the accessibility of the 14 new Luas stops and reporting any issues to Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII). TII are currently performing what is referred to as “snagging” which means that they are looking for and correcting any errors or flaws at the new Luas stops. They have been very responsive and efficient, so far. As fast as Fiona has been pointing out faults, TII have been fixing them, which is great! But when they hand over to Dublin City Council (DCC) we are likely to have much longer to wait for any further corrections or changes to be made, so Fiona is keen to report any issues before that handover takes place.

Some of the issues — such as open risers on stairs leading down to a Luas stop — are advised against in Part M of the Building Regulations, by the NDA and the Irish Wheelchair Association. Many people who are nervous can't bring themselves to use such stairs, and guide dogs also find them very stressful.

Please do tell Fiona if you notice a problem at or near any of the new stops. If she has not already done so, she will pass it on to TII.

### **Bus Connects**

The National Transport Authority (NTA) have told us that they are committed to improving the bus service in Dublin. The city centre traffic

has become more congested over the years, and most bus routes go into and out of the city centre. They believe that a way of making the bus service more efficient would be to re-route some buses, and add a lot more buses to the fleet, many of which will go around the city centre, rather than losing time getting stuck in traffic as they go into and out of the worst traffic.

This makes sense, of course, and they hope that in future nobody will have to wait more than 10 minutes for a bus, which would be great for the people who currently wait longer than that. But NCBI is very concerned that these major changes will make independent travel much more difficult and stressful for people with impaired vision.

We are currently in the Public Consultation Phase of Bus Connects. This will run until the middle of next year, 2019. However, many people with impaired vision were unaware of the consultation sessions, which have already been held in various parts of the city, and in any case the visual images used in these sessions were inaccessible to people with impaired vision. The website, [www.busconnects.ie](http://www.busconnects.ie) was also originally inaccessible to screen-reading software, and the form on which people could submit comments was also inaccessible, so Fiona Kelty reported this to the NTA's Communication Officer, who promised to rectify it as soon as possible.

**Fiona has also asked the NTA to provide at least one, but preferably two or three Consultation Sessions, at different venues in the city, specifically for people with impaired vision. She is currently awaiting a reply to this request.**

# NCBI Des Cullen Classic and Vintage Vehicle Show in its 22nd year!



**ABOVE: A close up on the badge of distinction and all that chrome!**



**ABOVE: Bonnet up, and let's see what you've got!**

**RIGHT: The devil is in the detail, and there's a lot of that!**



The 22nd annual NCBI Des Cullen Classic and Vintage Vehicle Show took place on June 24th. There was a huge array of over 100 cars displayed at the show including vintage, classic and sports cars. The show, which has been running since 1997, featured vehicles from the 1920s right up to 1980 and even early 90s.

Along with the magnificent vehicles there was refreshments, a best dressed competition and a pop-up shop on site selling great quality second hand clothes, shoes, household items, books and bric-a-brac.

The show raised over €7,500!

# Becoming a Regular Donor To NCBI

By donating to NCBI regularly, you will be contributing to the provision of NCBI's life changing services.

Our practical and emotional advice and supports help 8,000 people and their families face their futures with confidence every year.

We help people deal emotionally with the diagnosis of an eye condition and the impact it will have on different aspects of their lives, from family to work to education, now and into the future. One of the first things we do is provide information and advice about how your vision has been affected and how you can maximise the vision you still have.

We help people like Zikora, his Mothers says this about our services: "The NCBI has been a wealth of information, guidance and care. They have been with us all the way; I am so

happy with the help and care Zikora has received. He has come on

in leaps and bounds and it's all thanks to the NCBI" – **Hope, Zikora's Mother.**

Make a regular donation through our Direct Debit forms. The Direct Debit forms are available by contacting Roisin on the details below, from our retail shops and regional offices, or print the form from our website [www.ncbi.ie](http://www.ncbi.ie).

[roisin.walsh@ncbi.ie](mailto:roisin.walsh@ncbi.ie) or call (01) 830 7033.



## Tommy Campbell's Walk:

Tommy and his friends took to the streets for the second year to highlight the impact of obstacles on people with sight loss. The group walked across Dublin city in pairs with one person blindfolded using a long cane.



# NCBI Library collaborates with the Dyslexia Association of Ireland

As of June 2018, The NCBI Library in collaboration with the Dyslexia Association of Ireland is working towards the provision of accessible course curriculum to students in higher education.

Students with Dyslexia in higher education can now contact the NCBI Library with their reading lists and the NCBI Library will assist the students in making or retrieving their academic titles. The NCBI Library has access to over 340,000 titles with Bookshare. We also have excellent links with national and international book publishers.

Bookshare, offers the world's largest collection of accessible titles. Books can be listened to in high quality text to speech. A physical Braille, or large print copy can be produced from a digital file, and texts can be read directly from an internet browser.

All titles can be read on a suite of different devices including computers, tablets, smartphones and assistive technology devices. All Books that are available to the NCBI Library through Bookshare are copyright cleared and the Library would have access to approximately 340,000 accessible digital titles immediately. Bookshare is used mainly by students with sight loss or reading difficulties as well as libraries for the blind to access educational reading material.

## What does it mean for NCBI Library members?

This is good news for students in higher education and individuals with specific leisure reading requests. NCBI Library staff can search, download or make



"I have dys extremely h say to anyo saying I an didn't believ stupid. I did the person und ersto d means to h once told a and her resp didn't know normal."

available in digital format requested titles. If you have a student in your area in higher education, or is considering enrolling in the next academic year, the Library would be more than happy to advise their course coordinator, disability officer or the student directly on the availability of their curriculum in digital formats.

## How do I Join the NCBI Library?

For students with reading difficulties or vision impairment, the NCBI Library would need the student's name, address, date of birth and the Higher Education Institute that they are registered with. The student would also need to declare that they have a reading difficulty or a vision impairment.

# Association of Ireland



This can be done through the disability / liaison officer, or directly with the student.

The NCBI Library will also request a reading list and the assistive format that the student requires, (large print, MP3 audio, DAISY with images etc.) Once the registration is processed by the NCBI Library, the student is issued with a password and pin. The student is then directed to their Reading List on the Bookshare website - where the accessible books will be placed ready for them to download.

For more information on Bookshare, contact Lina [lina.kouzi@ncbi.ie](mailto:lina.kouzi@ncbi.ie) or call the Library: 01 8642266.

## NCBI's National Advocacy Network

In 2016, NCBI established a dedicated policy and advocacy team to campaign for positive and lasting change for the benefit of people with sight loss in Ireland. While NCBI has always been involved in shaping policy development and in advocacy, this was the first time we had a dedicated function focusing solely on this area.

Ongoing engagement and the continued participation of people who are blind or vision impaired was identified as key in our advocacy and policy work. We wanted to empower people with impaired vision to influence the decisions that affect them and ensure their inclusion in decision making processes. In order to do this effectively, we set up a National Advocacy Network.

Membership of our National Advocacy Network is open to people who are blind and vision impaired. By joining our National Advocacy Network, NCBI aims to enable a person to play a role in campaigning for change through a range of advocacy and engagement initiatives with the support of NCBI's policy and advocacy team. Membership of the National Advocacy Network might involve expressing your views to politicians and other decision makers, sharing experiences through media outlets and participating in consultations and other events. People can pick and choose what they would like to get involved in.

You can find out more about our policy and advocacy work and our National Advocacy Network by contacting Niamh Connolly, Policy Officer, on email [niamh.connolly@ncbi.ie](mailto:niamh.connolly@ncbi.ie) or logging onto our website at: [www.ncbi.ie/our-services/policy-and-advocacy/](http://www.ncbi.ie/our-services/policy-and-advocacy/).

# Service User Feedback

We are continuing to use the two methods of measuring general customer feedback, i.e. 60 second feedback from as well as in-depth survey telephone calls with the target of 5% of active service users.

Customer satisfaction remains high with 95% of those surveyed either 'very likely' or 'likely' to recommend NCBI to others. In the in-depth survey again we had 95% of people either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with 6 areas on which they were surveyed. It is interesting to note that knowledge and professionalism scores the highest satisfaction score (98%) with location scoring lowest (86%), we are hopeful that many of these issues highlighted with location will be resolved with our move to better facilities in Cork, Dublin and Mayo.

## **New NCBI Centres**

**Penrose Wharf, Cork city centre:**

Our new services centre in Penrose Wharf, Cork is complete and open. The official opening will take place on 8th October with Dara Murphy, TD. The facility is strategically located in the centre of the city and is equidistant between the train and bus stations. The new site is significantly more accessible and offers access from a wider selection of routes than our previous base in



**ABOVE: R-L: Finbarr Roche, Head of Property, with Chris White, CEO and contractor at the new Tallaght Cross premises.**

Ballincollig.

**Tallaght Cross, Dublin 24:**

In a similar vein to Penrose Wharf, we have completed the lease for a new premises in Tallaght Cross last month. Work is currently underway on this services centre, which will be fitted out to our needs and provides numerous transport links, based very close to Tallaght hospital.

**Castlebar, Co. Mayo:**

The new centre in Castlebar has been approved and we await licence agreements from the landlords. This is a significant addition to services in the West and will centralise offices that were previously remote in location. We are also in a hub type environment with other organisations of a similar nature utilising shared services.



# Charity single for the National Council for the Blind of Ireland

A loving dad, whose young son turned to karate after he was picked on because of his visual impairment, released a charity song in aid of NCBI. Kevin Farrell, 36, from Ballivor in Co. Meath says he recorded the Simon and Garfunkel classic 'Sound of Silence' in an effort to give all those who have been pushed around a voice to find a solution.

Kevin's son Josh, aged 6, overcomes challenges on a daily basis as he learns to cope with his visual impairment, he has Albinism. Josh took up karate after he was picked on and called names for being different.

Kevin explains where the idea to release a charity single stemmed from, "When Josh was diagnosed with Albinism at just two days old, and we didn't have a clue what to do. We were worried about how he would cope growing up. He's sensitive and suffered from nightmares after being mentally and physically picked on. I suggested karate to him as a boost to his self-confidence and he just loves it."

"I came across the song by accident, but I was instantly emotionally touched by it," said Kevin who sings with Eden, a popular wedding band. "It just reminded me so much of Josh who can see but not greatly as well as the devastating day we were told that he would be registered blind."

Kevin says, "The Sound of Silence, for me, sums up how we were all feeling when Josh was being picked on but also, how we turned that negative into a positive. We



**Kevin and Josh Farrell.**

worked together to overcome it and it led to Josh finding strength and confidence in himself through karate. Josh is now a medal holder with his success at various karate competitions."

"The NCBI has done so much for us in terms of education and support. I just wanted to give something back to them by helping to raise funds through the charity single. This song is for NCBI and also to tell anyone who has ever been pushed around that there are no problems in life, only solutions." The song can be downloaded on Kevin Farrell's music Facebook page and you can check out the official video on You Tube.

# Ann Sullivan Macey, Teacher of the Deafblind

**In this series, Frank Callery looks at the life of Anne Sullivan Macey, a teacher of deafblind people who enabled Helen Keller to see the world.**

Anne Sullivan was born in April 1866 in Feeding Hills, a village in western Massachusetts. She was the oldest child of Thomas and Alice Sullivan, immigrants who had left Ireland during the Great Famine; but the Sullivan family's life in America would not be a bed of roses.

When Anne was almost five years old, she contracted Trachoma, an eye disease caused by bacteria. Trachoma usually begins in childhood and causes repeated, painful infections, making the eyes red and swollen. Over time the recurring irritation and scarring of the cornea causes severe vision loss and Anne would have to deal with the effects of Trachoma throughout her life.

Anne's mother died when she was almost eight years old. Thomas Sullivan found it too difficult to raise a family by himself and soon abandoned his children. Anne and her younger brother Jimmie were sent to live in the "Almshouse" in Tewksbury.

Conditions there were deplorable. During Ann's stay it housed on average 940 men, women and children who were chronically underfed. The mortality rate was extremely high, and within three months of their arrival, Jimmie Sullivan died. Anne had been very close to her brother and felt his loss keenly. Luckily for Anne some people took an interest in her and gave her opportunities to improve her lot. She underwent eye

operations that gave her limited, short-term relief, and she took a trial position as a housemaid that ended unsuccessfully. Early in her stay at Tewksbury, Sullivan learned from a resident who was blind that there were schools for blind children. Realizing that her best hope lay in getting an education, she determined to get to one of them.

In 1880, a commission investigated the conditions at Tewksbury Almshouse. On the day of their visit, Anne followed them around, waiting for an opportunity to speak. Just as the tour was concluding, she gathered up all of her courage, approached a member of the team of inspectors, and told him that she wanted to go to school. Her bravery was to change her life and on October 7, 1880, Anne Sullivan entered the Perkins Institute at Watertown, Boston.

## **Worldly-wise and Different**

Anne Sullivan's life experience made her very different from the other students at Perkins. At the age of 14, she couldn't read or even write her name. She had never owned a nightgown or hairbrush, and did not know how to thread a needle. While she had never attended school, she was worldly-wise and different to most of the other girls at Perkins who were the cosseted daughters of wealthy merchants or prosperous farmers. Unfortunately, many of Anne's fellow students ridiculed her because of her ignorance and rough manners. Some of her teachers were particularly unsympathetic and impatient.

Anne Sullivan's recollections of her early years at Perkins were mainly of feeling humiliation about her own shortcomings. Her



**Anne Sullivan, as a young woman.**

anger and shame fuelled a determination to excel in her studies. She was a very bright young woman, and within a short period she had honed her academic skills. Her life at Perkins became easier. She connected with a few teachers who understood how to reach and challenge her. She had yet another surgery on her eyes, and this time it improved her vision dramatically. At last she could see well enough to read print.

Sullivan befriended Laura Bridgeman, another remarkable Perkins resident. Fifty years earlier, Bridgman had been the first person who was deafblind to learn language. Anne learned the manual alphabet from her, and chatted and read the newspaper to the much older woman.

Anne Sullivan excelled academically at Perkins, but she did not conform. She frequently broke rules; her quick temper and sharp tongue brought her close to expulsion on more than one occasion. She might not have made it to graduation without the intercessions of those few teachers and



**Anne Sullivan and a young Helen Keller.**

staff who were close to her. Not only did she graduate in June 1886, but she gave the Valedictory Address and charged her classmates and herself with these words: “Fellow-graduates: duty bids us go forth into active life. Let us go cheerfully, hopefully and earnestly, and set ourselves to find our especial part. When we have found it, willingly and faithfully perform it...”

Just what her “especial part” would be, was not at all clear to Anne. She had no family to return to, and no qualifications for employment. She feared that she would have to return to Tewksbury. Her joy at graduating was tempered by her fears about the future but fate intervened in an unexpected way.

During the summer of 1886, Captain Keller of Alabama wrote to the director of the Perkins Institute Michael Anagnos asking him to recommend a teacher for his young daughter Helen, who had been deaf and blind since the age of 19 months. It was a request that would change the lives of two remarkable women. — **To be Continued.**

# What Am I Worth?

**A circus coming to town brings an air of great excitement, especially when it is a circus of a different colour. One such circus came to play at the Carlow Arts Festival in June when circus group Extraordinary Bodies performed its show 'What Am I Worth'. — Frank Callery reports.**

Jonny the drummer's in a wheelchair; so too, is the guitarist John Kelly. Dergin the acrobat dances across stage on his crutches, David the deaf acrobat signs to the audience, as does the rope artist, Alfa. They all sign their inclusive introductions. The show begins. Local people of all abilities, who had signed on to take part in the show enter the stage as the narrator lays down the plot. We are all ears, children and adults alike who crowd the sun-dried lawn of St Patrick's college grounds, Carlow, to mentally answer the question "What Am I Worth?"

The blind member of the troupe is Amelia Cavallo, who plays accordion and keyboards and treats us to a feat of ability on the tumbling steel tombola. As she approached the huge spinning dish we are wondering if her spatial awareness will let her down. We are waiting for the clang, the crash. She advances to the spinning steel rig, white cane in her left hand, reaches up and with assured ability mounts and then proceeds to negotiate its honeycombed sections with deft precision. No fear, no error, just ability.

An American, Amelia first came to the London to study at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. Amelia works across

multiple performance disciplines including acting, music, circus and dance, her most enjoyable professional achievements have been performing as an aerialist as part of the Paralympic Opening Ceremony, as well as creating her own outdoor pieces 'I Breathe' and 'Sailing Through the Dark'.

"Extraordinary Bodies excites me because I get to do interesting and exciting things with circus that I've never done before, says Amelia. "I get to work with such a wonderful diverse cast, for a company that puts blind, deaf and disabled people at the forefront of contemporary circus. I have the chance to create something that is bespoke to a specific group of people, using a lot of the different skills I have spent my life honing. It's a unique thing we get to create, and that's exciting!"

## **Answers the headline question**

The narrator walks us through the segments and performer after performer compels our wonder and answers the headline question: "What am I worth?" John Kelly's no nonsense music pumps defiantly. Jonny Leitch's drums boom precision and reverberate beyond the audience.

Human Rights Campaigner Kelly is a self-taught musician and singer/songwriter. He has performed all over the world from Brazil to Estonia, playing for audiences of thousands. Most memorably he performed for 200,000 as part of an anti-austerity protest in Parliament Square, London and for 80,000 in the Olympic Stadium as part of the Paralympic Opening Ceremony. He has played rock 'n roll in Memphis and



Amelia



John



Jonny



Alfa



Dergin



David



The Carlow crew

Nashville, and has sang with the Blockheads, but his favourite gigs have been in the smallest of pubs in Ireland ‘with close family, friends, a packet of Tayto and a pint of the black stuff!’

Jonny Leitch’s drumming is extraordinary. He performs and composes for circus and theatre shows. He has worked for companies such as Graeae, Cirque Bijou and Diverse City, and as he showed at Carlow, has expanded his repertoire into dance and movement, both in and out of his wheelchair.

In this, the 229th anniversary of the introduction of ‘organised’ circus into Ireland by Philip Astley, on the green attached to Derby Square, off Werburgh Street, Dublin, it was fitting that a blind artiste was continuing in the tradition. (Astley was the first to introduce circus and harlequinade to Ireland (although there had been occasional circus acts prior to and contemporaneously, in Mrs. Mountain’s Theatre in Capel Street, Dublin). Two years later Astley moved to a more permanent home when he leased Molyneux House for his Equestrian Amphitheatre. Molyneux House was to become one of the early asylums for blind people, when, after Astley’s departure, The Molyneux Asylum for Blind Females was opened in June, 1815.



Above, The Carlow members of the cast go through their paces as John Kelly, Amelia Cavallo and Jonny Leitch provide the music.

Below, Amelia ascends on the giant tumbling tombola, watched by the show narrators.



# NCBI Asks of Budget 2019

**This year, NCBI made a pre-budget submission to five Government departments. In this article, we have outlined our key asks to each of the Departments.**

## **Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection**

Our Pre-budget submission to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection shows that people with sight loss are no less ambitious to partake in the labour force compared to someone with full sight. Yet the participation rate among people with impaired vision remains very low. Statistics indicate that the level of labour force participation amongst people with impaired vision is only 24.4%, which means that only 1 in 4 people with vision impairment are currently active in the labour force. This is a major issue as research found that the Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) for a single adult with vision impairment costs €44.54 (18%) more on a weekly basis than for a single adult in the main MESL budgets for the general population.

Welfare payments are being used to fill in the shortfall that the MESL research highlights. The basic rate of social welfare is lacking, and the additional supports of Living Alone Allowance, Fuel Allowance, and Household Benefits Package are being used to address this gap, before helping with the additional needs they are intended to provide for. Further inconsistencies, welfare traps and anomalies within various social welfare payments are outlined. We asked the Department to address the shortfall in welfare payments and correct the anomalies identified. We have also outlined a number of recommendations to the Department, which will enable people with sight loss to take up employment.

## **Department of Health**

Our asks to the Department of Health focused on restoration of funding to NCBI by at least 16%, which reflects funding reduction since 2008. This would enable NCBI to respond to

current and future growth in numbers of people experiencing sight loss.

We also pointed out that funding for assistive technology in Ireland is fragmented and uncoordinated. Health Service Executive (HSE) discretionary funding for assistive technology has been greatly reduced and in many HSE areas the funding stream has disappeared completely. We asked the Government to ensure fair and equal access to assistive technologies. A number of changes were also suggested in relation to eye tests and eyewear for people with impaired vision and access to personal assistant services.

## **Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport**

Public transport is the only means of transport for school, college, work, leisure activities for many people who are blind and vision impaired and therefore accessible public transport is vital for independence. In our submission to the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, we highlighted the problems created by:

- Trains that don't have audible announcements to allow a person with impaired vision to know where they are or when to get off.
- Buses that are capable of audible announcements but do so unreliably, and which are often inaudible.
- Trams that cannot announce their direction before a person embarks, leaving them unsure whether they are heading to the Point or to Connolly, or, going in the other direction on the Red Line to Tallaght Hospital or Saggart.

There has been progress, and we welcome that, but it has been slow and hard won. We must place disability at the heart of all decisions in relation to current and public transport infrastructure. We therefore asked the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, to support our asks to ensure a fully accessible public transport system.

## **Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government**

Our streets are a daily obstacle course for people

who are blind and vision impaired. Getting to work, the shops, the doctors, or accessing local services remains a huge problem and people who are blind or vision impaired are at a real risk of injury.

Our local authorities could do much more to make our streets accessible and inclusive for everyone. If decision makers understood how people who are blind or vision impaired navigate streets, they could help tackle one of the biggest barriers faced today by people with impaired vision. Sadly, there is not enough engagement between decision makers, people who are blind or vision impaired and representative organisations, to make this a reality. We're calling on local authorities to engage with NCBI and people who are blind and vision impaired in their area and sign up to a street charter that puts a 'safe footpaths' policy at the heart of their decision making.

We made a number of key asks to the Department which are outlined below:

- The Department should see NCBI as a key stakeholder and should involve NCBI in the consultation process.
- The Department needs to resource local authorities so that they can subsequently facilitate full access, inclusion, and participation of people with sight loss.
- Accessibility features on our streets must comply with legislation and directives and must be resourced by the Department.
- The Department needs to monitor progress on an ongoing basis.
- The Department needs to ensure that each local authority puts an Access Officer in place in line with the law (Disability Act, 2005) and provide the necessary resources and training.

**In our submission to the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment**, we outlined three key challenges that significantly impact on the lives of people who are blind and vision impaired. These are web accessibility, audio description and electric vehicles.

### **Web Accessibility**

The EU Web Accessibility Directive will

significantly improve the accessibility of online public services, websites and mobile applications for people with impaired vision. As the national sight loss organisation, NCBI asked to be consulted by the Department in relation to all stages of the Directives implementation and monitoring.

### **Audio Description**

The current targets for audio description in Ireland are too low and are considerably out of sync with the UK. RTÉ 1 and 2 have a target of 2.5% audio description for 2018 and RTÉ Junior has a target of 5%. In the UK, the audio description target is 10% but many broadcasters provide 20% audio description. We made three asks to the Department in relation to audio description. These are:

- Increase audio description targets to 10% by 2020. These targets are necessary if we are to catch up with our UK counterparts.
- Set targets and report annually on homegrown and international audio description broadcast by RTE.
- Ensure compliance across platforms such as the RTE Player.

### **Electric Vehicles**

In "A Programme for a Partnership Government" the Government states that it "want(s) Ireland to become a leader in the take-up of electric vehicles. We will establish a dedicated taskforce involving relevant government departments, agencies, industry and representative groups, to work on this goal and to set ambitious and achievable targets". NCBI asked the Department to allow us to be a full member of the taskforce to ensure that the needs of people with sight loss are represented and considered in relation to the provision of an Alert Vehicular Acoustic System (AVAS) that cannot be switched off.

### **More information**

You can find our pre-budget submissions on our website at [www.ncbi.ie](http://www.ncbi.ie) or you can contact our Policy and Advocacy Team on **Tel 01 8307033** or **[campaigns@ncbi.ie](mailto:campaigns@ncbi.ie)** for more information.

# Children's Assistive Technology Camps Summer

NCBI held two assistive technology camps for children with sight loss during the summer. The first of which took place in the University of Limerick with students from 15 to 18 years of age and the second was held in Mary Immaculate College for students from 10 to 14 years of age from different parts of the country. Both camps were residential based and offered accommodation to children and their families at a reduced cost either on campus or nearby. A BBQ and fun quiz with Street Boy from Limerick's live 95fm was held on one of the evenings which facilitated families in getting to know one another.

The main focus was on learning new assistive technology skills so instruction classes were held on a wide range of topics including using windows and apple based accessibility features, specialist magnification and speech software and trying out some of the emerging technologies. There were also classes on communication, listening, problem solving and mobility skills. We held some team building games with Get West which went down a treat. Overall the camps were a great success with positive feedback from the children and their families, we were also lucky enough to avail of the glorious sunshine throughout.

We are grateful to all of the staff and volunteers that took part in the events and to the staff at UL and Mary Immaculate College for hosting us. Attached are some testimonials from parents and students.

"Great knowledge acquired by us from

organisers"

"We enjoyed meeting up with others in a similar situation. It's good to compare different coping strategies"

"She has no contact with other teens outside of school so it was brilliant for her to meet others who understand her situation"

"Learning I can use an iPad in school and it works better for me instead of a laptop was really great"

"It is such good fun. When we are chatting and messing we forget why we're here, we forget everything. We forget we are vision impaired."

## **Independent Living Skills Workshop Limerick Summer 2018**

This workshop involved children from 6 to 9 years of age with varying levels of sight loss with the main focus being on developing skills in areas such as food and snack preparation, communicating needs, problem solving, using assistive technology and public transport.

We held this 2 day event in our regional centre in Limerick with 8 children from the Mid West region. Instruction classes included basic snack preparation, food hygiene and organisational skills, using magnifying devices and ipads as part of a treasure hunt and learning how to tell others about your needs. Bus Éireann facilitated and afternoon session by supplying a bus





**Facilitator, Parents and children at lunch.**



**Children at activities.**



**It's tough on grass!**



**Facilitators and NCBI staff.**

to take children on a trip around the city so that they could familiarise themselves with using public transport. We finished the event off by cooling down in the warm weather with a visit from the ice cream van!  
Parents' testimonials:

“My child looks forward to this event so much! It's wonderful for her self-confidence & acceptance of her condition.”

“Very beneficial in terms of meeting other children with visual issues. Great to practice every day skills.”

“A lot seems to have been covered in the two days”

The children rated the following as what they enjoyed about the camp:

- Making new friends
- Spreading, pouring, chopping
- Lunchtime, pancakes were the best
- iPad
- Making smoothies
- Scavenger Hunt
- The bus
- Ice Cream

And what they didn't like!

- Burping & farting by another child
- The quiet game.

# Fundraising Update

## Women's Mini Marathon

Thank you to Caroline Douglas, Lisa Shoebridge and Louise Crawford who took part in the Vhi Women's Mini Marathon on June 3rd, raising an amazing €4,794 for NCBI services. The three women work at Davy and we'd like to say a big thank you to them also as they are matching this amount, bringing the total to €9,588!

**BELOW:** Niamh Delaney raised €1,655 sponsorship for her participation in the Vhi Women's Mini Marathon for NCBI. In addition to this, Niamh came 2nd place in the Vision Impaired Runners category at the event — Well Done, Niamh!

Niamh called to NCBI Head Office at Whitworth Road, Drumcondra to present a cheque to Chris White, NCBI CEO.



## Salesforce Comedy Gig

In July, Salesforce's held a Comedy Gig in aid of NCBI, raising €6500. A great night was had with Julie Jay, Martin Angolo, Seamus Stackpoole, Bláithín de Burca, Brian

Gallagher, Michael Rice and Richie Bree entertaining the crowd. Pictured, RIGHT: L-R: Fionnuala Murphy, NCBI Head of Fundraising and Head of Communications; Julie Jay and Simone Palmeiri.



**ABOVE, L-R: Caroline Douglas, Lisa Shoebridge, Louise Crawford and Ruairi McGinley, NCBI's lead of Finance, at the cheque presentation.**



## What do you see?

Everyone tells me, I am blind.  
 But how can I be, I can still see.  
 My world is cloudier than it used to be.  
 But I am not blind, I am still me.

I thought blindness meant darkness.  
 But blindness is not the same for you or I.  
 It's just a different way to see the world.  
 People think you need a white cane and  
 guide dog  
 How wrong are they?

Blindness is different for everyone.  
 People don't understand, if only they  
 would see.  
 That you and I still have some vision.  
 It's just hard for them to imagine.  
 As all they see is darkness.

My world is still full of light and hope.  
 I just see the world different to most.  
 I need magnifiers to read as everything is  
 too small.  
 Though I am still me.

I wish people could understand I may  
 walk by, without a hello.  
 Your face is all but a blur to me.  
 I hope someday people will see.  
 I don't need a guide dog to help.  
 I just need people to understand I am  
 blind but I can still see.

**By: Donna McHugh**

# Student graduation at NCBI

A student graduation ceremony was held at the NCBI Rehabilitation Training Centre on Wednesday, July 25. Staff, volunteers and Board members attended the ceremony to support the students in celebrating their achievements.

11 students graduated from the 'Learning for Life' programme, having developed essential skills in independence. 8 students received QQI accredited Level 1 certificates, and 2 students successfully completed ECDL. The graduates will go on to pursue meaningful roles in the community, either in further education, community groups, or voluntary projects. The skills that they have learned in technology, independent living and communication will help them to approach life's opportunities and obstacles with greater confidence.

As NCBI Director of Corporate Services, Ruairi McGinley, aptly said on the day: we are proud to see our mission in action. The Rehabilitation Training Centre enables people who are blind and vision impaired to overcome the barriers that impede their independence and participation in society.



**Amy Stewart receives her certificated from NCBI Chairman, Paul Ledwidge.**



**Paul O'Loughlin receives his certificated from NCBI Chairman, Paul Ledwidge.**



**Zsafia Gruber receives her certificated from NCBI Chairman, Paul Ledwidge.**



**Nadine Heraghty receives her certificated from NCBI Chairman, Paul Ledwidge.**

# An Experience of a Lifetime!

Back in August, an advanced party of vision impaired Seen —Unseen art project enthusiasts met at Houston Station, Dublin, to take the train to Cork on the first leg of our trip to Cape Clear Island to participate in an art project SÚIL Harbour to Harbour by Artist Clare McLaughlin. Clare is the artist who runs the Seen-Unseen art project which explores the access to art for visually impaired people.

From Cork city we travelled Cork to Skibbereen for a short bus transfer to Baltimore Harbour where we boarded the Ferry to Cape Clear's North Harbour. Cape Clear is the most southerly inhabited land in Ireland. We had a superb view of the indented coastline on the way to the Gaelic-speaking island lying eight miles off the West Cork coast.

On arrival we were greeted by Clare McLaughlin who introduced us to our bus driver Ferdia who whisked us to The Tir na nÓg Hostel, our base for our stay. We were all keen to learn more about Cape Clear so we set off again on the Island Tour. Ferdia, who doubled as tour guide, is a long time resident and gave us an audio described insight into Island life. Cape Clear is an island laced with historic events and many historic Structures. The Island is also celebrated as a renowned "Bird Watchers paradise", which makes it a unique place.

We were joined by another six SÚIL Harbour to Harbour participants and we all headed to Cotters Bar for a very tasty home cooked meal. Followed by some leisure time in the lounge bar.

We were all up early on the Wednesday morning for a hearty breakfast in Mikie O Driscoll's Tir na nÓg breakfast room before making our way back down to the North Harbour to register for SÚIL Harbour to Harbour sculptural sensory

walk. Many like-minded people had gathered at Sean Rua's premises, where Clare McLaughlin addressed the gathering and outlined the course of action during the sculptural sensory walk. This was a relatively short walk, 335 metres in length and took us along the main public road from the North Harbour to the South Harbour. The pace was very slow and deliberate to allow us to draw on all of the sensory experiences along the route. We travelled up one relatively steep hill but given the slow pace, it was a very comfortable passage for the forty six participants. We all participated in the creation of a permanent conceptual sculpture of the walk using the guide rope and helped by Clare.

There was total silence as we moved slowly along the rope. Everyone holding it gently as they moved from the North to the South Harbours. Given the heavy Island mist, the rocky terrain and the incomparable flora and fauna enhanced by the silence, it was truly a memorable occasion. We finished with the rope coming together into a sculptural mind-map of the walk and everyone was presented with a short piece of rope as a keepsake to remind them of their own personal journey during the SÚIL Harbour to Harbour awe-inspiring event.

At the reception in Cotters, we sampled some treats, including Clonakilty black pudding roulade. We returned to Cotter's for our evening meal, followed by a very lively sing-along to celebrate this very successful event.

Early on Thursday morning on route to the return Ferry, we paid a flying visit to Ed Harpers Goat Farm for an insight into "goat life" and an opportunity to sample some Goat's milk Ice cream and purchase some cheese to impress our families, before re-joining the ferry back to Baltimore and the first leg of our return journey back to Dublin. — **Martin Kelly.**

# NCBI at National Ploughing 2018

Not even Storm Ali could dampen the spirits of visitors and exhibitors at the National Ploughing Championships in Scraggan, Co. Offaly, this September.

This was our third year to take a stand at the Ploughing, which provides a fantastic opportunity to tell people more about what it means to live with sight loss and how to take care of their eyesight. We are delighted to be supported by Bayer to ensure we can have an interactive stand which aims to give users a better understanding of the varying degrees of sight loss.

Many people presume that people experience sight loss in the same way and can see nothing, so it's important to show how different eye conditions affect your sight and really helps the understanding of people and what their friends, family and loved ones may be experiencing.

In our **AMD area** visitors used the NCBI/Bayer AMD Aware app to see for themselves the effects of age-related macular degeneration, in which the central vision is affected, making it difficult to read and recognise faces. There were also virtual reality (VR) head sets which gave people an immersive experience in the shoes of someone with AMD.

In our **daily living area** visitors could try on sim specs – glasses which simulate different eye conditions – and complete daily tasks like making a cup of tea in our kitchenette (don't worry, it was with cold water) and using a liquid level indicator, which beeps when the liquid gets to the top so you don't spill or scald yourself. They also saw how different eye conditions impact vision – such as tunnel



**ABOVE: L-R, Fionnuala Murphy, NCBI, Nial O'Connor, Bayer, Chris White, CEO, NCBI and Katie Carroll, Bayer.**

vision caused by glaucoma.

Our **#ClearOurPaths** walkway featured obstacles like a dustbin, scooter, sandwich board and coffee shop furniture. Visitors used sim specs to simulate total sight loss and used a long cane, with guidance, to work their way around the obstacles. The objective was for them to come out the other end with a better understanding of the obstacles that can impede the safe and independent travel of people with sight loss. They then signed their name to a pledge to #ClearOurPaths and not to park on the footpath, cycle on the footpath, to cut overhanging branches, etc, to create safer environment.

2018 was an epic Ploughing, with an extra day on Friday to make up for closure of the event on Wednesday due to the wind. We saw over 1,000 people at our stand and hope to be there again next year to talk to even more visitors.



**ABOVE: ClearOurPaths walkway featured obstacles like a dustbin, scooter, sandwich board and coffee shop furniture**



**The NCBI Independent Living Kitchenette.**



**ABOVE: VR headsets which visitors tried.**



**ABOVE: The NCBI Pledge Wall.**

# NCBI Residential Camp Carrick-on-Shannon

NCBI held a residential camp in Carrick-on-Shannon a couple of weeks ago. Stauntons link pharmacy, Castlebar, Co. Mayo supplied loads of products, samples and testers to use for our personal grooming workshop with teenage girls. We are grateful for their generosity. — Edel Doherty, NCBI CRW.



**LEFT and ABOVE:** the Personal grooming workshop taught facial mask application, nails and makeup techniques.

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## Join our National Advocacy Network

Ongoing engagement and continued participation of people who are blind or vision impaired is key to our advocacy and policy work. We want to empower people with impaired vision to influence the decisions that affect them and ensure their inclusion in decision making processes. In order to do this effectively, we set up the National Advocacy Network.

By joining our National Advocacy Network, NCBI aims to enable people with impaired vision to play a role in campaigning for change through a range of advocacy and engagement

initiatives with the support of NCBI's policy and advocacy team. Membership of the National Advocacy Network might involve expressing views to politicians and other decision makers, sharing experiences through media outlets and participating in consultations and other events. People can pick and choose what they would like to get involved in.

If you have a vision impairment or are the parent of a child with a vision impairment, you can join the National Advocacy Network by contacting our policy and advocacy team on [campaigns@ncbi.ie](mailto:campaigns@ncbi.ie) or Tel: 01 8307033.