

inSight

Magazine

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NCBI

Working for People
With Sight Loss

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NCBI inSight

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Editor: Frank Callery, Mobile: 087 6724097 email: f.callery@gmail.com

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Bird Box Challenge

By Kevin Kelly, Head of Policy, Advocacy and Campaigns

IN THE LAST month, I have faced endless questions around blindness and what it is like to be blind. This sudden public interest, bordering on fascination, with all things blind-related was sparked by the now infamous Netflix film Bird Box. Who would have thought that a mediocre film set in a post-apocalyptic world, about creatures that drive you to kill yourself just by looking at them, would spark a global craze of blindfolding yourself? The film has drawn our attention to how little the average person knows about what it is like to live with a vision impairment.

Eighteen years ago, when the lights literally went out for me at age fourteen, I spent a period of time fumbling around, walking into things, knocking things over, struggling to know whether clothes were inside out as well as overfilling cups and bowls. However, this phase was only temporary and gradually with help and support, I adjusted to my new reality. Like many people reading this, I still occasionally walk into things, but usually only if it's the morning after the night before!

Seldom in the past has anything catapulted blindness to the fore of people's thoughts and conversations like Bird Box did. People ask me silly questions ranging from 'how can you live alone?' to 'how do you know if it's day or night?' or my own personal favourite – 'where is your minder?' I'm well aware that there's no malice in these questions but such stereotypes are not helpful.

Undoubtedly, living with a vision impairment presents significant challenges and obstacles, although probably not the ones you'd expect, and certainly not the ones portrayed in Bird

Box. Take a simple example of going to the bank – if you imagined yourself doing this as a blind person, you might think that finding the building would be one of the biggest problems – but you'd be wrong. What happens when you get to the bank and it doesn't have any cashiers? One of the biggest problems with modern banks – as well as lots of other businesses – is that the majority of their terminals are now touchscreen and they are not accessible for people who are vision impaired.

In Ireland today, the government is constantly encouraging everyone to interact with state services through online portals too, rather than calling into a physical office. On the face of it, given that someone who is blind or vision impaired does not need to leave their house to use these services, this should make life easier. However, the reality is that due to a lack of thought, poor design and the government's failure to implement the European Web Accessibility Directive — many of these services are either fully or partially inaccessible. So, forget the Bird Box challenge. If you want to engage in a worthwhile challenge here's my suggestion: Try to challenge yourself to think differently, open your mind about blindness and start to challenge your own misconceptions as well as those of others in society.

Of course, sight loss presents significant barriers and obstacles. However, with the right support and rehabilitation, those barriers can be overcome — allowing people who are blind and vision impaired to live a life of their choosing. We have learned how to navigate the city streets but now we face new problems that are structural in that entire technological systems are designed with no thought for people who are blind and vision impaired. We are resilient and adaptable but we can only adapt so much, we also need society to adapt its technological systems so that we can navigate the maze of modern living.

Storytellers Gig

The Vintage Rooms in the Workmans Club was the venue for a special acoustic session of music by Brew Mbirika and friends Emma Hynes and Kevin Casey. This wonderful event saw three individual sets, where each artist introduced their music and performed in front of a lively audience. It also featured a preview of an upcoming documentary on Brew's career in music.



ABOVE, L to R: Kevin Casey (guitar), Brew Mbirika (guitar) and Emma Hynes (percussion) perform Tom Petty's "I Won't Back Down" in the Workmans Club Dublin.

The north Dublin native spoke about his motivation for the event and this is what he said: " 'For the craic' I went in for an eye exam even though I have perfect vision and don't wear glasses. I discovered I had glaucoma! Five surgeries later, one in the right eye and four in the left, it seemed fitting to raise awareness of the importance of getting your eyes checked!"



Brew Mbirika before the Storytellers Gig.



Working for People
with Sight Loss

Come run, jog or walk with
NCBI to help make a difference
for people living with sight loss

Join Team NCBI at

VHI Women's Mini Marathon
on Sunday, 2nd June 2019

Contact Roisin Walsh at
01 8821984/roisin.walsh@ncbi.ie.

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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 Mother 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.

roisin.walsh@ncbi.ie or
call (01) 830 7033.

NCBI Launches its First 'Learning through Play' Session

Our Children's Team are offering a new initiative, which offers a monthly drop-in session for parents of children who are blind and vision impaired. The 2-hour session focuses on strategies to support overall development through play for a child.

We were delighted to welcome five families to our new premises in Tallaght for our first session. The children enjoyed the sensory and music play activities and meeting new friends. The parents chatted with one another over coffee, sharing tips



and advice. Well done to our team members Margaret Bousquet, Lisa Marshall and Veronica Doran, who were assisted on day one by Marilyn Lawlor and Fiona Hogg.

Policy and Advocacy

Silent Vehicles

While the advent of electric vehicles must be welcomed from an environmental and health perspective, we must remember that they pose a serious safety risk to those who are blind and vision impaired. Electric vehicles are virtually silent, which makes it impossible for someone who is blind or vision impaired to detect them approaching. Electric vehicles are also a problem to children, cyclists and older people. Failure to tackle this issue will inevitably result in serious injury and even death.

NCBI believes that an Alert Vehicular Acoustic System (AVAS) that artificially creates a sound is vital. EU regulation 540/2014 mandates all manufacturers to equip their new electric and hybrid vehicles with an AVAS by 1 July 2021. In practice, this means that all electric vehicles sold in or imported into the EU need to have an AVAS. The United Nations Economic Commission on Europe (UNECE) World Forum for Harmonisation of Vehicle Regulations (WP29) adopted the UN Regulation 138, called the “Uniform Provisions Concerning the Approval of Quiet Road Transport Vehicles with Regard to their Reduced Audibility”. This standard, while not mandatory, gives guidance to vehicle manufacturers in Europe, Asia and North America.

It is a major achievement at a European level that AVAS will be introduced. However, there are three issues that need to be improved in the legislation. These are:

1. The AVAS should be activated for speeds of up to 30km/h not 20km/h.
2. The minimum sound level for AVAS should be raised sufficiently. Manufacturers often set their AVAS at the minimum level.
3. There should be a mandatory stationary sound for vehicles as well.

The European Blind Union, of which NCBI is a member, will assist the European Commission’s evaluation of the rules in 2021 towards these points.

What can the Irish Government do?

There are already hundreds of electric vehicles on the road in Ireland. Only a tiny minority of these will be equipped with an AVAS. The Irish government can play a role in retrofitting existing electric vehicles. It can also provide funding to retrofit public transport that was purchased with public funding. NCBI intends to lobby the Irish Government about this issue during 2019.

The EU Web Accessibility Act

As society becomes even more digitalised, it is essential that these advancements are made accessible to people who are blind and vision impaired.

In Europe, there was no one single, coherent law in relation to the accessibility of information, services and products. The European Accessibility Act (EAA) seeks to bridge this gap. It has marked a huge step

forward in making the web, apps, ATMs and payment terminals accessible to people who are blind and vision impaired.

However, the Act's effectiveness has unfortunately been diluted somewhat by a number of exemptions that member states can opt-out of. For instance, public service broadcasters and, ironically, the European institutions themselves, are not compelled to make their associated websites and apps accessible. It is disappointing that the accessibility of the built environment, transport, tourism and public procurement also fall outside the scope of the Act.

NCBI believes that European member states, including Ireland, should fully commit to go above and beyond the minimum obligations imposed by the Act in its transposition and implementation phase at national level. NCBI will continue to the on this issue during 2019.

Making Voting Accessible

NCBI has been invited to sit on a new Working Group on Accessible Voting set up by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. The focus of the first and second meetings was to look at ways to make the European and local elections in May even more accessible than the presidential election and referendum held last October. There were discussions about what adaptations are needed to the tactile ballot paper template used in October.

NCBI also pushed for the production of an information pack to be sent to people who are blind and vision impaired in advance of voting so that each person can try out and

become familiar with the template in the comfort of their own home. The work being carried out is very promising.

Shared Space

Shared Space is a new design concept which removes all kerbs that define the boundary between the footpath and the road and the space is shared by pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles.

It is essential for the safety of pedestrians who are blind and vision impaired, older people, and parents walking young children (who are instructed to "stay on the path"), to provide footpaths with kerbs. Even very young children understand that they are safe from cars if they don't step off the kerb. Recently, there is a trend to use shared space, where pedestrians are expected to mingle with traffic and cyclists. This is too stressful for pedestrians who are blind and vision impaired to use comfortably and therefore, NCBI does not recommend the use of shared space.

We believe that local authorities should explore the following options instead:

- Each local authority should review their policy in relation to shared space. Rather than continuing to remove kerbs, the focus should instead be on learning to understand the principles of universal design, and genuinely following them, in all new urban design projects.
- Local authorities should assess any plans for changes to public spaces for accessibility.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

Plans which would make a space inaccessible should not be approved, as they would not comply with either the Equal Status Acts 2000-2012 or the Disability Act 2005.

- Local authorities should work with people who are blind and vision impaired and NCBI to assess the safety of existing shared spaces. Where safety issues are identified, measures need to be taken including the reintroduction of kerbs and crossings.
- Local authorities should involve and consult with people who are blind and vision impaired and NCBI when new shared space schemes are planned, and make any necessary changes to the schemes. Where it is not possible to make a shared space scheme accessible for all, NCBI will not support its introduction.

The Inaccessibility of Touchscreen Payment Terminals

Touch screen payment terminals are not accessible to people who are blind and vision impaired. Currently, customers with sight loss are left standing at the check-out unable to pay for their purchases because they cannot use an inaccessible payment terminal. The person cannot see the numbers on the screen or press the keys on the terminal because it does not provide any tactile or audible feedback.

There are nearly 55,000 people with sight loss in Ireland all of whom will experience difficulty with using touchscreens. This means that a large number of customers are being excluded from carrying out payments

in shops, restaurants, at ticketing machines and at other public access terminals, on a daily basis. This problem needs to be dealt with as a matter of urgency as our society transitions to a less cash environment.

Touchscreen payment terminals can be made accessible. They could for example be equipped with audio output, a screen with more contrast and larger fonts and fixed places for the keys. Bluetooth or Near Field Communication (NFC) could be part of the solution.

Until manufacturers who produce touch screen payment terminals determine the most effective way of delivering accessible touchscreen solutions, we are asking all retailers to hold off purchasing touchscreen payment terminals.

App Trial for DART Users

Funding of €160,000 is being provided for the second phase of an Irish Accessibility App project for rail users with disabilities. Irish Rail is looking for people who are blind and vision impaired, who are regular DART users, to try out the app. The app only applies to DART and not other Irish Rail trains. If you are interested in testing the app, please let us know by emailing us at campaigns@ncbi.ie.

Increase in Earnings Disregard

People in receipt of disability allowance are to be allowed earn €427 a week without losing their medical card under measures introduced last December by Minister of State for Disability Finian McGrath and Minister for Health Simon Harris.

From the 1 December 2018, the medical card

earnings disregard for persons in receipt of disability allowance will be significantly increased, from €120 to €427 per week and will apply to the assessment process for both single persons and to family assessments. This increase of more than 250% means that the earnings of someone in receipt of disability allowance that can be disregarded under the medical card assessment process have increased from €6,240 a year to €22,204.

This change is a key recommendation of the Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities report, published in 2017. The report found that the single greatest barrier to employment for people with disabilities is anxiety around losing their medical card. The measure introduced aims to address this and support people with disabilities to enter into employment.

Currently, single people on disability allowance lose their automatic entitlement to a medical card at a threshold of €313 a week – made up of a €193 social welfare payment and €120 from what they can earn at work.

An estimated 826 people with all forms of disability will immediately benefit from the introduction of the higher earnings threshold.

However, this change only relates to Disability Allowance and not Blind Pension. While the Department has no plans at present to amend the current medical card income disregard for recipients of Blind Pension, it has reassured NCBI that the matter will be kept under review by the Department. We hope to campaign further on this matter to ensure that recipients of Blind Pension also benefit from this measure.

Extending the Free Travel Scheme

One of the main impacts of blindness and vision impairment is lack of capacity to drive a car and therefore public transport is the only means of independent travel for school, college, work, leisure activities for people who are blind and vision impaired.

Free travel is a vital means of supporting independent travel. The free travel scheme offered by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection is something that is hugely valued by those who can avail of it. The criteria for eligibility however, is causing a difficulty for some who cannot see enough to obtain a driver's licence and yet do not fulfil the current criteria for eligibility. They fall between two stools. This problem is affecting 700 of our service users.

To qualify for blind registration and eligibility for free travel, best corrected vision must be equal to or less than 6/60 in better eye or field of vision must be limited to the extent that widest diameter of vision subtends an angle not greater than 20°.

People whose vision does not meet the above qualifying criteria for registration as blind and do not meet the qualifying criteria for driving a car are missing out. They cannot drive but they cannot avail of the free travel scheme.

We are currently lobbying the Government to ensure that the eligibility criteria for access to the free travel scheme be changed to include those with a long-term eye condition that renders their level of vision insufficient to meet criteria for a driver's licence.

If this issue affects you, we would be delighted to hear from you, please email the NCBI Policy and Advocacy team at campaigns@ncbi.ie or Tel: 01 8307033.

MayFest 2019 — An Invitation!

Vision Sports Ireland is delighted to invite you, your family and friends to MayFest 2019. Established in 1981, MayFest is Ireland's national multi-sports carnival weekend for people who are blind and vision impaired and all interested parties.

Save the dates of Friday 17th and Saturday 18th May.

MayFest kicks off this year with a junior sports day at Childvision in Drumcondra on Friday and then locates, for the first time, to Trinity College on Saturday.

This event has something for everyone. It has 15 sports activities including competition, demos. Attendees can try out the A-W of sport: athletics, blind golf, duathlon, football, GAA, judo, junior parkrun, parkrun, rowing, swimming, tandems tour, tandem on the track, tug o' war, tennis and the new sport of wrestling. Most events will be held at Trinity College, on Saturday from 10am until 5pm. The first Trinity event will be the swimming challenges. Legendary swim coach Frank Cullinane will set goals and targets for all registered participants. Separately, we will host a sponsored swim over 500m or 1000m at €50 per entry. Events off site include the Raheny Park parkrun (9.30am Saturday), a 29k Tandem Tour at Rogantown Country Club (9.30am Saturday).

Vision Sports President, Prof. Michael O'Keeffe, is currently arranging for celebrity attendance for Saturday lunchtime at MayFest. Bring your autograph book!

Vision Sports has arranged for the provision of a limited amount of self-catering accommodation. Rooms will be available for the very keen price of just €40 per room per night.



Please book no later than next Tuesday, 8th May, with Rahim 085 8500193.

Full details from MayFest Director Alex Whelan 085 8500193, email Alex@visionsports.ie. You can also check out www.visionsports.ie or find Vision Sports Ireland on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram



ABOVE TOP: participants in the tandem tour to Roganstown last MayFest, Repeat the experience in 2019!

ABOVE: Plenty of rope and plenty of pulling power at the Mayfest Tug-o-war! Be there this year and flex a little muscle!

Vision Sports Ireland and Northern Ireland Blind Golf



Vision Sports Ireland and Northern Ireland Blind Golf are delighted to announce the launch of a children's art and essay competition. Children with vision impairments who are aged between 9 and 12 years from across the island are invited to participate in this competition. Children are required to explore and focus their entry on sport and leisure for people with low vision. They should write an essay or create an art piece linking it with sport and leisure.

On week beginning 16th June 2019, the Ryder Cup of Vision Impaired Golf — the Vision Cup — will be held at Portmarnock Golf Links, Co. Dublin. At the opening ceremony, the Vision Sports Ireland James Joyce Awards will be presented to the best essay writers and artists by Minister for Children and Youth Katherine Zappone TD. Winners may be accompanied to the awards ceremony by parents / guardians and teachers. Where overnight accommodation is required this will be covered by the organisers.

Please contact Joe on 0831922891 or email joe@visionsports.ie for entry forms and any further information. Closing date for entries: 17th April 2019.

Kathleen Forde, NCBI “Rambling” Volunteer

Frank Callery talks with Kathleen Forde, an NCBI volunteer with The Ramblers’ Club.

I’m waiting at Kathleen Forde’s hall door. She’s running a little bit late, having been out at a lunch for Anne Claffey’s birthday. Anne is a vision impaired member of the Ramblers club and Kathleen Forde is a sighted guide.

Kathleen says: “About six years ago a woman put a notice in our newsletter that there was a group of blind people who liked to go walking every week, but they didn’t have enough guides. A few of us were interested and we did a half-day’s training in NCBI and we commenced walking with them on Thursday afternoon for about two-and-half to three hours”.

Kathleen was also involved in a organisation called Friends of the Elderly for many years and she thought that she would like to volunteer her time to work with a person who is blind or vision impaired. “About four years ago NCBI’s Community Resource Worker, Jo Nicholson, put me in touch with Eddie O’Reilly, a man who was blind, and had a physical disability, living at home. And for two years I visited him every week and he was one of the most utterly delightful people you could meet. Eddie wasn’t highly educated, in a formal sense, but he had a wonderful mind. We had wonderful conversations every week.

“Unfortunately Eddie died. Jo Nicholson then asked me to visit another blind man, Jim Hayes. Jim was totally different to Eddie. He lost his sight in middle age but was mobile enough to go out and about. We were doing OK and then he broke his hip, and I broke my leg so I could not continue the visits. I did go back a few months ago but Joe has moved to Kells, so I am currently not visiting anyone but I am still involved with the weekly walks.”

While our friends who are blind and vision impaired often thank us for our help we all agreed we were probably getting more out of it than they are. And I find that people who are blind and vision impaired are a diverse group — who are just happy to be getting on with their lives and to get out walking. Several of our vision impaired ramblers were involved with An Oige in their younger days and used to go hostelling and cycling on tandems so they are people who like to get out and walk. Without a guide they have to go slow and use the cane. Now we don’t go that fast but at least they can go at a more reasonable pace.”

The ramblers go to about ten different locations around the city, and usually have a meal afterwards, and that social element is an important part of the club. The walks are about two to two and a half hours duration; mostly on the flat and they usually cover ten to twelve kilometres. On any given day there could be 22 ramblers — about 20 remain for the meal.

As I am speaking with Kathleen I realise that I know her or, at least, know of her. And I am right in my assumption. Kathleen Forde was a legend among working class women on Dublin’s Northside. She and her colleagues, at Coláiste Dhúlaigh, and Kilbarrack, were responsible for the return to education programmes which brought an educational focus to people who had otherwise lost out on opportunities. Many still remember her contribution to their return to and continuing education.

Kathleen was born on Long Island New York. Her parents moved around a bit. They were emigrants from Ballycastle, Co. Mayo, to which they returned when Kathleen was eleven. She and her sister attended the local school in

Ballycastle.

“When I finished secondary school I wanted to go to college, but we couldn’t afford it, so I eventually went back to New York where I could get a job and pay for it myself. I lived with an aunt and I stayed there until I finished college.”

In 1973 Kathleen returned to Dublin and got a job teaching with the VEC in Clogher Road — “Teenage boys! It was very difficult! I then got transferred to Whitehall which was even more difficult. So after seven years teaching at that level, in 1980 a job came up in Adult Education and it was a great liberation. That was in Coláiste Dhúlaigh, Coolock.

“I was employed as an Adult Education Organiser, we were not employed to teach people, we were employed to try to get things going in the community, and it was also the beginning of the whole literacy movement for adults who needed to learn reading and writing, so we were involved with a wide programme that was relevant to what we were doing. It was what I wanted to do, much more so than working with teenagers. I was happy to have a job that suited me.”

In fact, Kathleen used to go around to ladies clubs to get them interested in doing something; “One night I was told, yes, you can come on Thursday night, we are having a fancy dress party. So I said OK, I will go, and I am there talking to the women about Adult Education while Bugs Bunny and Sinbad the Sailor and



**Kathleen Forde,
educator and
volunteer.**

others dressed up in outfits, giving me a fraction of their attention. But through the Ladies Clubs we did get something going.

“It was such a revelation to me to meet people who were so self-educated but without formal education. Once they got going they did great things. They had abilities, a lot of them had to leave school early, they would have liked to have stayed on, but they did not get the opportunity. The Adult Education programme did get things going and made a big difference.”

Kathleen’s has been a life of service and contribution. She continued that with her visiting work with NCBI and her work with her vision impaired friends in the Ramblers’ Club.

Training Our Advocates

One of the objectives of our Policy and Advocacy Team is to build the capacity of advocates with impaired vision through training. Fujitsu, our corporate sponsor, partnered with the training company SureSkills to provide this training.

We are delighted to inform you that 10 advocates with impaired vision have now received training in Communication Skills and Team Building. The training courses were held in our Head Office in Drumcondra over two days. We hope to work further with our newly trained advocates on our upcoming campaign and lobbying work in 2019.

If you are interested in becoming an advocate and helping NCBI with its campaigns, please email your name, mobile number and county which you live to campaigns@ncbi.ie or call our Policy and Advocacy Team on Tel: 01 8307033.



Fancy a trip to "The Home of Golf" St. Andrews in October? To be in with a chance to win this amazing prize, please check out our men's competition at <https://www.ncbiholmpatrickcup.com/> and women's at <http://ncbigranardcup.com/>. You can also register your club details online. Entry is only €7.50 per person and minimum entry applies. For further information, please contact Allison Harvey at 01 8821939.

New Audio Description

For those of you who have not heard of it before, audio description is like a narrator telling a story where an additional commentary describes body language, expressions and movements. This makes the story more understandable and enjoyable for viewers who cannot see the television screen.

Audio description is a service that can transform television viewing for people who are blind and vision impaired by assisting them to follow what's happening.

The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) recently revised its standards in relation to audio description – the Access Rules.

We are, however, very disappointed to report that the audio description targets set by the BAI remain dreadfully low despite our efforts to persuade them to set targets that would catch up with those set in the UK. This year, Irish viewers who are blind and vision impaired can only view 5% of programmes on RTÉ 1 & 2 with audio description. Only 6% of programmes on RTÉ Jnr will be available to children who are blind and vision impaired. Targets set for 2023 are still a meagre 10% for RTÉ 1 & 2 and RTÉ Jnr.

In the UK, there is already a statutory requirement on broadcasters to provide 10% of their programming with audio description, with many broadcasters actually providing double that requirement. Ireland needs to catch up with these standards.

Table 1, above, right, outlines the audio description timeframes and targets for the

Targets

TABLE 1: The table below outlines the audio description timeframes and targets for the 2019-2023 period as set out in the revised Access Rules:

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
RTÉ 1 & RTÉ 2	5%	7%	8%	9%	10%
RTÉ Jnr	6%	7%	8%	9%	10%
Virgin Media 1	0%	2%	3%	4%	5%
+ 1 and HD Channels	Any audio description carried on the main television service will be made available on + 1/HD channels.				

NCBI has called on the BAI to set the targets below.

	2021	2022	2023
RTÉ 1 % RTÉ 2	12%	15%	20%
RTÉ Jnr	12%	15%	20%
Virgin Media 1	4%	7%	10%

period 2019-2023 as set out in the revised Access Rules:

NCBI does however welcome the fact that Virgin Media 1 will start broadcasting some of its programmes with audio description. The target set for Virgin Media 1 is, however, only 2% of its programmes. Targets should have been at least 1% in 2019 and 2.5% in 2020.

Table 2 above shows NCBI's preferred targets.

It is also vital that home produced programmes are broadcast with audio description. At the moment, many of the audio described programmes that are being broadcast, such as Eastenders, Emmerdale and Coronation Street, are UK productions, which are bought in by our main Irish

broadcasters. This allows Irish broadcasters to reach their annual targets quite easily.

The BAI needs to set homegrown production targets as a matter of urgency. Irish broadcasters should also be obliged to provide the BAI will a breakdown of targets that detail how many programmes are home produced with audio description and how many have been bought from other countries with audio description already included.

NCBI believes that TV licence fees should be spent on the production of audio description for home produced programmes.

We will continue to work with the BAI on these matters to ensure that the targets are set at a more acceptable standard.

Jordan Mahony Proves that Good Readers Make Great Writers!

On Friday, 22nd February, Jordan Mahony was presented with his first place prize in the Onkyo Braille Essay competition.

Jordan came first in his age group with an entry on Braille and his life which can be downloaded from the NCBI website. Jordan's dad and step-mum joined him in the NCBI's Head Office for a celebration and recognition of his achievement.

The event was also attended by Lina Kouzi, Library Manager who said "At the NCBI Library, we were delighted to hear that Jordan won the first prize in the Excellent Works Category of the Onkyo Braille competition — The Title of his essay *My Life with Braille* captured the imagination of the judges at the EBU. For the past ten years NCBI has been submitting entries to the Onkyo Braille Competition and Ireland has won the top prize on three occasions. Congratulations to Jordan and hopefully he will enjoy spending the prize money!"

Members of the NCBI's Senior Management Team and even the NCBI's Chairman, Paul Ledgwise joined Jordan who was presented with a bronze and oak engraved plaque from the competition organiser. This is the third time that an Irish person has won this competition, which runs annually.

Submissions for the 2019 competition will commence in April 2019.



L-R: Chris White chatting with Jordan's dad Laurence, and Jordan T. Mahony.

Excerpt from Jordan's Essay...

LIFE WITH
BRAILLE

By Jordan T.
Mahony.



"I still find it hard to believe that I have survived so much being visually impaired. It is my never ending outlook on life that keeps me going. I believe that there will be a time where there will be a better world for visually impaired people. A world where we can all be free. I have no problems with my life, in fact, my life is just fine because I am able to still enjoy it, visual impairment or no visual impairment. I know that I am still human. I am still Jordan. I do not care what people think



Pictured in the NCBI Board Room, back row: L-R: Sarah Williams, Corporate Engagement Manager, NCBI; Finbarr Roche, Head of Property, NCBI; Tom Daly, Project Manager, NCBI; Paul Ledwidge, Chairman, NCBI; Lina Kouzi, Library and Media Centre Manager, NCBI. Front Row L-R: Ms Mahony, Jordan's Step-Mum; Chris White, CEO, NCBI; Jordan T. Mahony; Laurence Mahony; Joe McKenna, Head of Foundation, NCBI.

I can do or what I cannot do. I have come to terms with my impairment. I know that there will be a time where I will go blind and you know what I am not afraid. Besides my friend Michael is blind and he does not let life get in his way. If he can do it, then so can I.

I have read many books over the years. My favourite books are the likes of *Harry Potter*, *Percy Jackson*, *Vampire Diaries*, *The City of Bones* and *X-men*. But for that I have to thank the NCBI which is the National Council for the Blind of Ireland. They give me my Braille and my audio books. But, more importantly, they give me the opportunity to let me go into my world and be myself. I just

love my books. The only thing that I wish that could happen is if graphics or comics were in braille. Then they would be readable for the visually impaired. It has not been done yet but I think it can be done. There is no point having a world where the impossible is not made possible. The world would be well just sad. I just know that it would be a sad world. The world is a big place and we should be there to explore it. To make it a better place then what it already is. I have a life to live and I will sure as hell not waste it."

Jordan Mahony's full essay can be read on www.ncbi.ie

Vision Sports and the Galway Cycle 2019

Every year students from Maynooth University organise a major charity cycling event. Over the course of a weekend up to 250 people cycle from Maynooth to Galway and back again.

This 400km endurance event has been run annually for the last 33 years and has become well known throughout Ireland, particularly in the cycling community. For 2019 the Galway Cycle has chosen Vision Sports as the charity that will benefit from the proceeds raised by the event.

It is an incredible opportunity for Vision Sports and they have big plans to put the money raised to good use over the coming years. The proceeds from this year's Galway cycle event will fund the development of the multi-sport Youth Inclusion Games offering opportunities for 1,500 young people who are blind and vision impaired — it will be rolled out on a regional basis over three years. The funds will provide for adaptive equipment such as tennis balls, tandem hire, guide tethers and sound balls to be used during the games. Other costs such as venue hire, transportation costs, coaching and medals will be covered. The Youth Inclusion Games is aimed at increasing levels of participation in sports for young people who are blind and vision impaired.

Vision Sports was chosen down in no small part due to its National Development officer and local Maynooth man Joe Geraghty who has put in phenomenal work promoting the charity. His work along with the work of Bernie Everard secured Vision Sports as the chosen charity for the 2019 Galway Cycle. Bernie Everard contacted Vision Sports back in 2014 looking for support for her brother in law Shane who had 5% vision following a brain tumour. Shane sadly passed away in August 2016 having enjoyed tandem cycling and becoming heavily involved with Vision Sports through his role organising Mayfest. Bernie, who used Shane's old bike in the 2017 Galway Cycle,



nominated Vision Sports in recognition of the support her family received during a difficult time.

The cycle will take place on the 5th -7th April 2019. One of the key elements of this year's cycle is the use of tandem bikes. It is hoped that the cycle will attract over 30 tandem teams, the largest ever gathering of tandems in Ireland. This peloton will cycle ahead of the other cyclists and will be the first group to arrive in the towns along the route from Maynooth to Galway.

Vision Sports are looking for people to get involved and support the Galway Cycle. To make this event run successfully it requires as many cyclists as possible, over 60 volunteers to work as a support team and over 350 street collectors, shaking buckets in Galway's City Centre on Saturday 6th April. Getting involved in the Galway Cycle is a great way to meet new people and to take on a new and exciting challenge. If you are interested in getting involved either as a cyclist, on the support bus, or as a bucket shaker in Galway please get in contact with Joe at joe@visionsports.ie.

If you don't wish to attend the cycle in April but would like to contribute there are other ways in which you can support this worthy cause. Vision Sports are always looking for donations and if you or a business you know would like to consider sponsoring the Galway Cycle please do not hesitate to contact Vision Sports to discuss the options available.

On Saturday 23rd February in Presentation Girls School, the Galway Cycle and Vision Sports will be holding a Pedal Powered Cinema Fundraiser. Cyclists will power a cinema style showing of the children's classic movie, Toy Story. All are welcome to attend on the day and tickets are €5 at the door. If you'd like to sign up to be a stationary cyclist at this event get in touch.

Sight Loss Awareness Days

NCBI will be participating in three awareness campaigns about sight loss this year. They are:

AMD Awareness Week

Each September, Novartis Ireland runs its annual AMD Awareness Week campaign. NCBI, along with the Association of Optometrists Ireland, Fighting Blindness and the Irish College of Ophthalmologists proudly collaborate with Novartis Ireland on the campaign. Whilst the campaign provides information and education on AMD to those aged 50 plus, it also provided information to the influencers in their lives; their sons, daughters, grandchildren and friends on the importance of eye health. Find out more at www.amd.ie

World Sight Day

For World Sight Day last year, NCBI expressed serious concern at the impact of ophthalmology waiting lists on the health and wellbeing of the more than 40,000 people who continue to face long delays in accessing potentially sight-saving treatments. We also

warned of knock-on delays in referrals to NCBI services for people who are experiencing sight loss.

This year, World Sight Day will be held on Thursday 10 October. We will again draw attention to issues surrounding the prevention of sight loss, so that no one is needlessly losing their sight.

World Glaucoma Week

Another important advocacy event on the eye health calendar is World Glaucoma Day. This campaign will be held from 10-16 March 2019.

Keep an eye on our website www.ncbi.ie for more information about these campaigns. You can also contact us on Tel: 01 8307033 or info@ncbi.ie or log onto Facebook at NCBI - Working for People with Sight Loss or Twitter at NCBI_sightloss.

How to make a referral to NCBI

A person with sight loss can avail of our services by filling out our online referral form at www.ncbi.ie or call us Monday to Friday, from 9am to 5pm on Tel: 01 830 7033.

What happens during and after referral?

When you contact us, we will request the person's contact details and their eye condition and any other additional information to gain a basic understanding of the person's needs.

This information is given to our local NCBI worker so that an appointment can be made to meet with the person in one of our local offices. During the first appointment we will talk to the person further about any concerns or difficulties that they are having and find solutions together.

Staying Safe This Winter

It's still Winter, despite the good weather. A magical time of year but it's also a time when we need to prepare for travelling in icy and snowy weather. Travelling in ice and snow is challenging for everyone, but it can present additional problems for people who blind and vision impaired.

The footpath, when covered with snow and ice, becomes much more difficult to navigate. Snow covers landmarks such as the change between grass and footpath and crossing the street can become very challenging, as it is harder to hear the sound of cars in the snow. But like everyone else, people who are blind and vision impaired will want to still go on with their activities, so here are a few hints and tips that might help to relieve some of the challenges of winter weather.

- Before you leave your home, check the weather, plan your route and give yourself extra time to get there.
- Wear brightly coloured, reflective clothing, so that drivers can see you.
- If there is snow and ice outside, wear ice and snow grips on your shoes to prevent falls.
- As the snow muffles sounds, avoid hats with ear flaps or ear muffs to make sure you hear important sounds.
- Walk at a slower pace as needed and, on black ice, take smaller steps than usual. If landmarks are covered in snow, rely on taller landmarks to navigate, such as bushes, fences and sign posts.
- Stay connected. Travel with your mobile phone and charger. Think about using a mobile phone app to keep track of your directions and location. Tell family or friends where are going, the route you will be taking and what time you expect to return.

- Bring with you any devices you use for reading, such as a handheld magnifier. In very bad weather, only travel if you must. If you need assistance, ask for help.

NCBI's orientation and mobility instructors can also help you to travel with confidence. To find out more about this services please call us on Tel: 01 8307033 or email: info@ncbi.ie. Safe travels to everyone!

Thinking about booking your summer holiday?

If you're travelling by air it might be useful to know about your rights as an air passenger who is blind or vision impaired.

EU legislation was put in place in 2008 to ensure that everyone, including people who are blind and vision impaired, can travel by air with ease. The regulation ensures that assistance is provided that is adapted to your needs, from the moment you arrive at the airport to your departure. This assistance will be provided at no additional charge, by a person who has undergone disability awareness training.

Your obligations

You should give at least 48 hours' notice of your need for assistance, which can be given at any of the points of sale of

tickets. If advance notice is given, the airport's managing authority will provide the assistance necessary to ensure that you make your flight. Without prior notification, they will make all reasonable efforts to provide assistance, but it cannot be guaranteed.

Responsibility of airports

The managing bodies of airports will provide the assistance and facilities necessary to enable you to:

- Announce your arrival at an airport and request assistance.
- Check in and register baggage.
- Proceed from the check-in counter to the aircraft, with completion of emigration, customs and security procedures.
- Board and disembark the aircraft, offering assistance as needed.
- Communication of information needed to take flights in accessible formats.

On board the aircraft, the airport management body is responsible for guiding you to your seat and for storing your hand luggage. From then until you are ready to disembark the aircraft after the flight, it is your airline that is responsible for helping you if you need assistance.

Responsibility of airlines

It is the responsibility of your airline to:

- Carry your guide dog in the cabin, subject to national regulations.
- Communicate essential information concerning a flight in accessible formats.
- Offer you assistance as needed.

You can read more on the European

Commission's website about passengers' rights when travelling by air at <https://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/passengers/air>.

How it works at Irish airports

At Dublin, Shannon and Cork airports, a company called **One Complete Solution (OCS)** is in charge of providing assistance to passengers who are blind and vision impaired.

If you need assistance, you are obliged to make a request through your airline or travel agent at least 48 hours in advance of your flight. The airline then gives OCS 36 hours' notice that you will require assistance and what that assistance will be such as sighted guide, etc.

You can find out more information on Dublin Airport's website at www.dublinairport.com/at-the-airport/passenger-Information/special-assistance/reduced-mobility.

Once you arrive at the airport, you can notify OCS of your arrival at one of the help points, go straight to the OCS office or check-in with the airline and OCS will meet you there. OCS is then responsible for bringing you to the gate and for getting you on the plane if necessary.

Airlines are only obliged to provide assistance on the plane, not in embarking or disembarking. Once you arrive at your destination you should be asked to wait on the plane and a member of OCS (or the airport managing body if outside Ireland) will come to the plane to assist you.

Crowe Lent their Voices to Fuel Children's Imagination



In early 2019, volunteers from Crowe lent us their voices as they gave life to characters in two children's story books being produced by NCBI's Library Services. The volunteers attended the NCBI Library's state of the art recording facilities and read aloud the stories, which were recorded and will be available from the NCBI Library Service.

One chapter was sent for early release to NCBI service user Josh, who spoke to Morning Ireland about what audio books mean for him. A full recording of the Morning Ireland interview with Josh, some volunteers from Crowe and Lina Kouzi, NCBI Library Manager can be found on ncbi.ie.

L-R- Gerard O Reilly, Crowe partner, Claire Shiels, Laura Lynn (seated behind), Lisa Kelly, CSR Chairperson, Karl Browne, NCBI Library Services.

Crowe had a gathering yesterday for the staff that were involved in the production of the two children's story books. Karl Browne, sound engineer from the NCBI Library attended the event. Karl spoke about the journey of audio book production and thanked the staff from Crowe for their time and effort in working with our studio.

If your company would like to volunteer with the NCBI, contact Sarah Williams by email to sarah.williams@ncbi.ie

New Joyce Bench Unveiled at NCBI Head Office



ABOVE: The Front Bench! Seated, left to right: Harry Crosbie, broadcaster Gay Byrne, James Joyce actor, John Shevlin, author John Banville, and film maker John Boorman, with, Back Row, NCBI Chief Executive, Chris White (third from left) with NCBI Management and staff and local neighbours at the unveiling of the Joyce Memorial Bench.

On a special occasion we were delighted to unveil our new bench dedicated to James Joyce's father, John Stanilaus Joyce. John Stanilaus Joyce died in the former Drumcondra Hospital, which NCBI later purchased as its head office.

At the time in 1931, James Joyce requested that his father be commemorated by a bench where people could sit and chat.

In the company of Harry Crosbie, Gay Byrne, John Banville and John Boorman, we are delighted to have been able to do this with the help of



ABOVE: James Joyce actor, John Shevlin seated on the bench at NCBI.

Harry Crosbie, Llewellyn Farquharson and his father, Robin Farquharson.



The Vision Sports Ireland

James JOYCE Awards 2019

Dear School Principal,

On behalf of Vision Sports Ireland, the National Governing Body for sport for blind and vision impaired people, and Northern Ireland Blind Golf, we invite children living in Ireland who are registered blind/vision impaired, to participate in a brand-new art and essay competition. Entrants must be aged between 9-12 years old on 31st May 2019. For the competition, pupils should either write an essay or create an art piece focusing on sport and leisure for people with low vision.



On the week beginning 16th June 2019, the Ryder Cup of Vision Impaired Golf - the ISPS Handa Vision Cup - will be held at Portmarnock Golf Links, Co. Dublin. It is fitting that the opening ceremony will be on Bloomsday, as Joyce himself endured significant sight loss. At the opening ceremony, the winners of the essay and art competition will be presented with the Vision Sports Ireland James

Joyce Awards by Minister for Children and Youth, Catherine Zappone, T.D. Winners may be accompanied to the awards ceremony by parents/guardians and teachers. Where overnight accommodation is required, this will be covered by the organisers.

The Art Judging panel will be: Jim Fitzpatrick (Dublin), Deepa Mann Kler (Down) and Eamon Colman (Kilkenny). The Essay Judging panel will be: Barry Egan (Dublin) TBC, TBC

Please call me on +353 (0)83 192 2891 or email me joe@visionsports.ie should you need more information.

Kind regards,

Joe Geraghty