

# inSight

Magazine

Vol. 21, No. 2. Summer 2018



NCBI

Working for People  
With Sight Loss



**They came, they saw and they had a ball!  
Irish and Spanish Vikings roaming Dublin  
on an NCBI/ONCE exchange which  
brought joy and plenty of the right booty  
to a great week — See pages 14-15.**





Participants in the Iona Fun Run in the Phoenix Park — see story on page 10.

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**NCBI inSight**

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# SIGHTLINES

## The 'Pillar' of Society

The European Pillar of Social Rights was jointly signed by the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission on 17 November 2017, at the Social Summit for Fair Jobs and Growth, in Gothenburg, Sweden.

The 'Pillar' of Social Rights sets out 20 principles for a fairer, more inclusive European Union (EU). By uniting and guiding Member States on improving daily life, employment and welfare, the Pillar sees itself as being good for citizens and good for sustainable economic growth.

It hopes to capture a renewed public and political 'will' to strengthen social rights at a time of concerns about the future of work, inequalities and demographic change. It also sets out rights for workers in new, often precarious, forms of employment.

Those who are critical of good outcomes to these aspirations cite the slowness of the processes in bringing them to fruition and there is justification for cynicism.

A look at some of the actions envisaged, reveals that, although they are noble in themselves, progress has been slow and outcomes doubtful. For example, in December 2015, the European Commission introduced discussions on legislation



to make products and services more accessible for people with disabilities. With this European Accessibility Act, the Commission proposed to set common accessibility requirements for certain key products and services that will help people with disabilities at EU level to participate fully in society. These are still being debated in the Commission, the Parliament and at the Council of the European Union (Trilogues, they call them). Optimistically, it is expected that agreement will be reached in 2018.

In April 2017 the Commission introduced legislation to improve the work-life balance of working parents and carers. This proposal set a number of higher minimum standards for parental, paternity and carer's leave, by increasing possibilities for men to take up parental and caring responsibilities and by supporting women's participation in the labour market. To date this has gotten no further.

Undoubtedly there has been much to praise in the actions which have emanated from the social policies originated and enacted from the EU, but it really needs to improve on its systems and its delivery times, if people are to keep faith with its proposed social enactments.

# Scope Ophthalmic's support for Children's Camps at UL



**Tom Freyne of Scope Ophthalmic and NCBI's Amie Hynes-Fitzpatrick at the cheque presentation.**

Scope Ophthalmic have teamed up with NCBI to support the delivery of our incredible Residential IT Camps for children with sight loss. The camps will take place in the University of Limerick this summer.

Technology is the greatest equaliser for people who are blind or vision impaired, given the importance of IT and its significance in empowering independence and participation in all aspects of life from education to employment.

Scope Ophthalmic generously donated €5,000 to NCBI to cover the cost of the residential IT camps. The camps allow

children who are blind or vision impaired, to develop a suite of IT and independent living skills.

Bringing children together from across Ireland, the camps also facilitate peer to peer support, allowing our extraordinary children with sight loss to share their experiences and strategies in overcoming barriers to inclusion.

Early adoption to assistive technology greatly increases independence. Our goal is to provide both blind and vision impaired children from primary and secondary school levels with life enhancing IT skills with both mainstream and assistive technologies.



# 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 Katie. She says this about our services:

"My brain tumour came as a bolt out of the blue and had a serious effect on my sight.

I was suffering from blurred double vision. I turned to the NCBI for help and guidance. NCBI has been a Godsend; they have given me help, support, information and a network of contacts. My family has benefited too, as we all feel supported. I am very optimistic for the future and this, in no small part, is down to NCBI."



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.

## Fundraising dance in Tipp for NCBI

In March, despite the snowy conditions, a Fundraising dance took place in aid of NCBI. Thanks to the organisation of Mary Madden, a great crowd flocked to Fitzpatrick's Country Club, Clonmore, Templemore to dance to The Brendan Lee Band. Organiser Mary Madden, who is well known in her home village of Clonmeen Co. Laois, said people rallied to the cause as the NCBI is known and recognised for the "Excellent work and service it provides. It truly is a hard working charity,



left to right, Anne Creagh, Helen McEvoy, Lisa Connaughton, Sean Creagh and Mary Madden with their generous cheque.

and sure we all like to do what we can." Thank you to Mary and everyone who supported the event raising €2,450.

# Get to Know Us in NCBI

**Kim Wulff has recently been appointed as Manager of NCBI's National Rehabilitation Centre, Sally McEllistrim reports ...**

Originally from Canada, Kim says that she decided to pursue a career as a Rehabilitation Worker when she experienced first hand the progress a close relative made in becoming independent.

Kim says "I was very young when I watched her learn how to prepare her own breakfast and travel routes around the neighbourhood with her Long Cane. So in 2009, after graduating with a degree in Health Sciences, I went on to complete my training as an Orientation and Mobility Instructor."

Kim then took sail and gained a wealth of experience, "This work took me to New Zealand, where I specialised in working with children and qualified as an Independent Living Skills Instructor. I lived in "the land of the long white cloud" for two years, and once I'd eaten, bungee jumped and trekked my way around the country, I decided that I had been officially bitten by the travelling bug.

I moved to Ireland, where I continued to develop my practice through my work as a Rehabilitation Instructor (with Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind). This role gave me the chance to explore all 26 counties, and learn how Irish people truly live."

Outside of work Kim loves a challenge and

to explore, "I enjoy hiking, travelling, and getting stuck into a jigsaw puzzle."

"I joined the NCBI as National Training Manager in December, and over the past few months have been settling in to the team and learning about all that the Training Centre has to offer. Going forward, I'm really looking forward to helping the NCBI to shape and deliver world class rehabilitation services."

The National Training Centre offers personalised rehabilitation services to people between 18 and 65. The "Learning for Life" programme is designed to help people build skills and confidence in independent living, technology, and communication. Some modules are certified by QQI which help on the pathway to higher education. Developing skills in Braille, Computers, Daily Living and Self Advocacy help our learners to pursue meaningful roles in the community. Our





**Kim Wulff, Manager of the NCBI National Rehabilitation Centre.**

training is available on a part-time or full-time basis to suit individual needs.

Please contact Kim at 01 8821909 if you have any questions about training options (which will help you to live your most positive and purposeful life.)

## Death of our Colleague, Paul Traynor



Sadly, since our last inSight magazine our good friend and colleague Paul Traynor has passed away. Paul died suddenly at his home in Carrickmacross on the morning of April 16th.

Paul worked with NCBI since 1999 as our chief technical support officer. Ever patient and always ready to work on the most complex of technical issues he was the man who found technical solutions for so many people.

He gave tirelessly of his own time, often working well into the evenings and at weekends to ensure that everyone got the very best from their technology. It is evident Paul helped and made a huge impression on a huge amount of people, when we informed people of his passing through our Facebook page, 113 people left comments under the post about his great work.

To his wife Teresa, and to his family, we extend our deepest sympathy.

Paul Traynor was a true gentleman in every sense of the word. His knowledge and the lengths at which he went to use it to help others was unparalleled in our community. All of us at NCBI are honoured to have worked with and been a friend of this wonderful man, who we will all miss so much. May he rest in peace.



# NUIG Students complete project on public transport in Galway



**This article was written by Hugh Bulfin, Rachel McLaughlin, Tara Ferry and Siobhan Quirke who are 3rd year occupational therapy students from National University Ireland Galway. They are currently completing a project about public transport for people with a visual impairment. It is interesting to read the team's perspective and conclusions following their study.**

Studying to become an occupational therapist has made me and my classmates consider the ways that those with disabilities have been excluded in our society, constantly. The doorframe is too narrow for a wheelchair, or the dull colours in a nursing home make it difficult for those with Dementia to navigate. When asked to consider where people are being excluded due to factors outside of their control, it came as a surprisingly difficult question. We were placed in groups of four and asked to really consider this question and how we could help.

We came up with “are those with a visual impairment excluded from public transport?” Initially we thought this was a weak question because of the innovations in recent years in this area, like yellow tape to note where the bus is when entering and tactile paving at road crossings.

Researching this we found interesting articles on stress and how this can affect those with visual impairments. Stress around transport affected many with a visual impairment, and many found it easier to get taxis than to use the public buses. This more expensive alternative flagged that maybe

this was a problem and more could be done to alleviate this stress. Another interesting finding was that stress decreased with each consecutive use of the bus services. This research wasn't done in Ireland, and we wanted to know more and understand this problem from a more direct perspective. We connected with the NCBI. This organisation has been working with people with visual impairments for years and provides ongoing support to enhance the independence and provide instrumental help.

## **Mobility Training**

What we learned completely reframed the way we saw people with visual impairments. When meeting with Deirdre Towey, we were given a swift education on all things mobility. Mobility training prepares people to travel specific routes. When required to learn a new route, separate training is needed in the future and that is just to get you to the bus stop. We learned about the use of a cane and its complexities as well as the expense in training guide dogs.

We then turned our focus to transportation. We were required to make a video highlighting the social exclusion issue. We met with some service users from NCBI for some deeper insights for the purpose of the video.

Five people showed up with enthusiasm as they wanted to do anything that might help improvements. There were a few structural things that limited their use of public transport, like the small text on the screens displaying destinations on the buses and the more obvious lack of audible announcements. What was far more interesting was the way that the public





presented its own unique barriers to those with visual impairments.

Lack of basic understanding or “cop-on” as Marian, one participant explained, was the main problem. The way that we think we are helping those with a visual impairment can be quite scary for them. Sighted passengers may grab the arm of people with a visual impairment without verbally asking if they need help. Without being able to see your footing, this is exceedingly stressful. All it takes is to imagine being in that situation and how that might feel for the person with sight loss.

Participants described how people give them a nod of the head, without verbal feedback. Verbal feedback is extremely important to people with visual impairments for obvious reasons, and yet people will still nod their head instead of speaking.

When the bus is busy and there are bags left down this also presents problems. Sometimes people with vision impairment might ask the bus driver to warn them when their stop is close — they are heavily reliant on the goodwill of the driver and other people who do not encounter these problems — and bus drivers or passengers may forget to inform them.

Another participant, Cara, says that she sometimes stands at the bus stop, looking lost so that someone might come to help her. She might have to shout, “Excuse me”, until someone stops and helps. There is a common misconception that it might be offensive to ask if someone needs help. All participants said they would not be offended by the offer of assistance.

Participants also described the more structural problems on buses. There are screens that display the next five stops, but these are inaccessible because of the small print. There have been efforts to get audible announcements for each bus stop in Galway, but this has not happened yet. Some people didn’t even know the name of their bus stop and many sighted people might admit they don’t either.

In more rural areas there are few markings on the steps into the bus. This gives the added worry that you might trip when boarding. Another notable problem is presented when there is a pole at the entry to the bus. For a guide-dog user, they might miss this pole, or even bump into it. This adds extra confusion for the VIP traveller. Bus timetables online and in physical form are in extremely small print. Though technology has evolved to read much of what is on the internet, people still have trouble accessing the information from timetables. The software simply doesn’t accommodate the access to bus times.

Avoidance of public transport is common, meaning many people must use taxi services, which is an additional financial burden. There are reduced rates offered by the Centre for Independent Living, but they are still expensive.

It is easy to ask someone if they would like help; ask them for the best way that you can assist and perhaps warn them when their stops are coming. If nothing else is taken from this, the main hope is that we just ask if help is needed more often and to be mindful that everyone is different and so is the help that they might need.

# Fun Run with NCBI at Phoenix Park

On the 4th of May a 5k fun run took place in the Phoenix Park, organised by NCBI's Iona Centre. With over 60 people taking part, the run raised €3893.40.

The fun continued when participants went back to the Iona Centre to refresh with soup and sandwiches. Well done to everyone who took part on the day.



Above, a finish salute from Marie Lovell and David Kortukohun.



Above, centre, Training Centre volunteer Eileen Battersby with guide dog, Hattie; and right, Zsafia Gruber.

Below: All the gang who enjoyed a great day out.





# In Memoriam Brian McKeever

There was much shock and sadness when NCBI staff learned of the recent death of their former colleague, Brian McKeever.

Brian worked as a CE Supervisor with NCBI.

Mary Cox who works in HR recalls “Brian was a very chatty person he would always be in work very early in the morning. I think he liked to be in the car park first! He would come in to the canteen for a cup of tea and would chat to anyone there. When he retired from his position as CE Supervisor he volunteered with NCBI Retail. He had a place in Westport where he would head to at the weekend. He never talked about his illness so nobody knew he was sick. It is a shock to all of us who know and worked with Brian.”

This is echoed by Retail Area Manager, Janet Kavanagh, who has many happy memories of times spent working together “I was so sorry to hear of Brian’s passing. I have many fond memories of him when he was based in our Thomas Street shop. We had some great fun. We used to have him trying on all the hats and clothes and had such good times with him. He was a lovely man and so easy going and funny. He was greatly missed when he left.”

Our thoughts are with Brian’s friends and family.



Above, Hats Off! As Gerard Devereux comes in first to the finish.



Above: Heading for the line, Joan Skerrett and Naoise Kelly.

# Reflections on the Delta Gardens in Carlow

**Following a recent trip to the Delta Gardens on the outskirts of Carlow Town by members of the Newbridge Family Resource Centre (FRC) Men's Sensory Garden Group, Martin Kelly writes:**

The members of the FRC Sensory Garden group met at the Centre, bright and early before setting off on the relatively short journey to Carlow Town, where these extraordinary gardens are located. From the moment we entered the Delta's Visitor Centre, we sensed that we were in for a treat. After a brief outline of the gardens, we embarked on our tour of discovery. It certainly proved a sensational excursion for all concerned.

Just like children in a sweet shop we took off very enthusiastically and while some members of our group have previous knowledge of gardening and could identify many of the plants and herbaceous shrubs, we were having difficulty in coming to terms with most of the phenomenal ornamentation. However, before too long we stumbled across a Delta Gardener called Angela and she put lots of little things into perspective for our enquiring minds.

As this was tiring work and after an early start, we adjourned to relish a very hearty lunch in the Delta food hall which catered for our disparate tastes. Now fully replete, we didn't wait to sample the Delta's delicious homemade desserts, and because of time constraints, everyone was anxious to head back out to complete the Delta Garden experience.

Fortunately, we came across awesome Angela again and given that some of our members have a visual impairment, Angela offered to take us on a more comprehensive journey around

the five Senses Garden areas, which we truly benefited from.

This included our good Leader (Luke) volunteering to step on the representational ear to hear a beautiful nightingale sing a pretty tune for him. We were taken on a virtual touch tour of the area and even got to taste a variety of the plants, in this sensational garden.

## **The Celtic Walk, accessible to every one**

We had earlier experienced several of the themed gardens from the formal Rose Garden, to the Peace Garden, the Circle of Life: the Stolen Child and the Wellness garden. Not surprisingly, there is now a Memorial Garden to commemorate the period from 1916 to the present day. The Celtic Walk around the gardens is purposely designed to make the whole experience accessible to everyone and wheelchair users can move around the many gardens with ease.

As we subsequently discovered, the various impressive freestanding limestone features were the creation of Bob or "Bob the Builder" as described to us. Angela also managed to dig up "Bob the Builder" and he was more than happy to share with us his ideas around the numerous creations, which are fundamental to the Delta Gardens. Bob answered a range of telling questions from the group before going on to describe the piece of limestone that he was currently working on which will find its way into one of the themed gardens as it evolves into a large tree.

Angela then accompanied us to the Poly Tunnel area where a vast array of plants are under cultivation and will shortly find their





**The Sensory Gardens, Carlow.**

way to the Delta Garden shop. After this insight into plant horticulture, we then made our way to the Delta Green House and once again Angela explained how the latest collections of various seeds were starting out on their seasonal plant lives.

Unfortunately, the thief of time had caught up with us and it was time to once again re-join our transport and for Darin to take us back to Newbridge and our own fertile space, now armed with a myriad of fresh ideas to assist us in the creation and cultivation of the Newbridge FRC Men's Sensory Garden.

**Left to right: head gardener. Angela, with Martin Kelly, Gary Worn and James Kavanagh.**



# Student Exchange with ONCE of Spain



Along with 10 Irish students, NCBI hosted 11 students from the Spanish organisation ONCE as the second part of an exchange program that began in 2017. We held the event in Ozanam House, Mornington, Co. Meath, the sun even shone the day our Spanish guests arrived!

We enjoyed sharing our Irish music, dance, food and history with the students, the week was action packed. A visit to Newgrange was essential to showcase this rich historical site in County Meath. Day activities included a cooking workshop, Irish music and dance sessions, a GAA taster session, assistive technology workshops, mindfulness and yoga classes.

A trip to the capital city took place to enjoy the Viking Splash experience and learn about our Viking heritage, followed by a necessary shopping expedition to

Blanchardstown shopping centre.

The Irish students participated in the preparation of the camp and the choice of activities, which enabled a smooth and successful program of events. This program was a fantastic opportunity for our Irish students not only to travel to another country and experience a new culture but more importantly to develop their independent living skills and share their life experiences and strategies with other students with vision impairment.

We are very grateful to the NCBI staff members who took part, our volunteers, parents and donors, whose contributions were essential to the success of the program. We look forward to the next series of adventures with our partner organisation ONCE.



**Left: Top of page 14, the combined group of students and guides pose for the group shot.**



**RIGHT: Students participating in the mindfulness and yoga classes.**



**ABOVE: All horns and helmets and Viking cheer, the gang out on the Dublin Viking experience tour.**

**RIGHT: Students participating in the cooking workshop.**





# NCBI Open Day 2018

Our Open Day took place on Saturday 19th of May. It was a great day filled with fun, sun and chats. The day allowed our visitors to learn more about NCBI, from people who use our services already, people interested in using our services, fundraisers, donors, volunteers, neighbours and the general public.

We Showcased our Training Centre, Technology, NCBI Library, Shop items and aids. The Iona Centre had a stand of fabulous crafts; Vision Sports Ireland had lots of sports to try out and we had a pop up Charity Shop with loads of bargains.

We are hoping this will be an annual occasion!



ABOVE, L-R: NCBI Chief Executive, Chris White with Cormac Todd from Fujitsu.



BELOW: Shoot-out! NCBI's Amie Hynes-Fitzpatrick tries her luck with Alex Whelan from VSI in goal.

Above: L-R, NCBI personnel, Janet Kavanagh, Corina Merrigan and Ruairi McGinley at the pop up shop at NCBI Head Office grounds during Open Day 2018.





# Volunteer Appreciation Lunch



Some of NCBI's Volunteers who received their certificates of Excellence and Achievement, pictured at the lunch with NCBI's Head of Retail, Finbarr Roche.

NCBI Charity shops rely heavily on the hard work of our volunteers. It is important for us to recognise and thank our volunteers for their commitment and contribution to NCBI Charity Shops.

A huge thank you to:

Pauline McDonnell — NCBI Charity Shop Kells.

Carmel Moorehouse — NCBI Charity Shop Kells.

Nan Hopkins — NCBI Charity Shop Athy.

Maura Doran — NCBI Charity Shop Athy.

Mary McEvoy — NCBI Charity Shop Bunclody.

Martina Hickey — NCBI Charity Shop

Bunclody.

Ann Geraty — NCBI Charity Shop Wicklow.

Ann Looby — NCBI Charity Shop Wicklow.

Delores Griffiths — NCBI Charity Shop Ballyfermot.

Kathleen Kiernan — NCBI Charity Shop Celbridge.

Bernie Gough — NCBI Charity Shop Celbridge.

The volunteers all came to NCBI head office and were given an insight into NCBI's services and in particular learned all about assistive technologies. All volunteers were presented with Certificates of Excellence and Achievement.

# Warm Tributes for Des Murphy

A man of ability whose capability outshone any disability his sight loss may have caused him.

This is the overriding sentiment being expressed by people in NCBI who knew, worked with and respected the late Des Murphy, well known advocate for people with impaired vision.

Des's long connections with NCBI came about in the mid 70s when he himself made contact with the charity as his sight deteriorated. Working as a Senior Public Relations Manager with Glaxo, he was curious as to what aids and devices might be able to support him in his work.

Then based in Armitage House in Lower Hatch Street, NCBI did not specifically support people with information or training on how to make best use of low vision with the help of devices.

Des saw this as a major shortcoming and thus established connections with the charity which were to be far reaching and highly productive. He led a collaborative venture between NCBI and St Mary's School for Blind Girls in Merrion for the establishment of a low vision clinic in the school headed up by the late Bernadette Culliton.

The NCBI moved to its current Whitworth Road premises in 1988 and Des played a major part in this development as it was he who first saw the premises for sale and drew the Board's attention to its availability.

Former CEO of NCBI, Des Kenny, has fond memories of working with the late Des Murphy. "He was instrumental in ending the "radio for the blind" advertisements on RTÉ Radio and

replacing them with ads crafted by him with new wording to tell the public that the work of NCBI was more than about providing radio sets to "compensate for the loneliness and darkness" brought to people with blindness. The "wireless for the blind" advertisements were fashioned around emotive images of loneliness and helplessness in order to stimulate donations. Des Murphy believed in building images of able people who, with assistance, could have their independence maintained or restored, depending on the onset of sight loss."

"He was an active volunteer who used his own experience of managing with his own considerably reduced vision, to interpret and to work for a new future for NCBI when it was moving from just a "care" service to one which also would embody the rehabilitation and technology tools to support a person's self-fulfilment as an active and valued participating member of society."

Fiona Kelty, Access and Awareness Coordinator with NCBI worked closely with Des Murphy for some years. She recalls his dedication saying it has resulted in far reaching and lasting improvements in the lives of people with sight loss. "Out of all the voluntary work that Des did for NCBI and people with impaired vision generally, one thing in particular has had continuing nationwide relevance. He took Dublin City Council to the Equality Tribunal for turning off the audible signals at pedestrian crossings in the city centre, and won his case — on the grounds that he had previously been able to get around the city independently."

"The main gain was that DCC agreed that





**The late Des Murphy.**

they would not switch off or remove audible signals, and that whenever they were installing pedestrian crossings, in future, they would ensure that they were sufficiently far apart so that sounds from one audible crossing could not be confused with sounds from another. DCC also committed to meaningful consultation and communication with NCBI before making decisions about pedestrian crossings.”

“Des was on the Board of NCBI for many years, and continued to be involved in access issues for many years after he resigned from that position. I asked him to replace me on the Disability Focus Group of the Community Forum, which he did for some years. He was also an advocate for NCBI on the Bus Éireann Users Group, for many years. Unfortunately, due to failing health, he eventually had to resign from these positions, but remained interested, although no longer so active. I was very sorry to hear of his death.”

This is echoed by all of us in NCBI who knew and worked with Des Murphy. His shadow is a bright one.

## **Dublin Marathon will include two prizes for runners who are blind or vision impaired**

Following representations from Vision Sports Ireland we are delighted to announce that the 2018 SSE Airtricity Dublin Marathon will include two prizes for runners who are blind or vision impaired. The first male and female finishers who are blind or vision impaired will each receive a prize of €750.

Entry is now open for the Dublin Marathon will take place on Sunday 28th October and will attract 20,000 participants.

This is the first time in its 38-year history that this famous Marathon has kindly provided prizes for our top blind/vision impaired athletes.

One-time Marathon runner Joe Geraghty from Vision Sports says “This is a fantastic development. We know we have hundreds of blind/vi runners out there and this is the ideal incentive to go the extra mile, eh! 26.2 miles, and complete a marathon. Vision Sports very much appreciate the support of Race Director Jim Aughney and his team.”

The SSE Airtricity Dublin Marathon is also an International Paralympic Committee (IPC) approved event. Therefore, the marathon provides a pathway to qualification for major IPC events.

Check out all details on how to register as a blind/vi runner or guide runner for the SSE Airtricity Dublin Marathon at [www.visionsports.ie](http://www.visionsports.ie)

# 'Beyond the Darkness'

**Sally McEllistrim talks with Robbie Dowdall on adjusting to life after sight loss.**

Robbie Dowdall is a fighter. He has had to be as his life was thrown into turmoil when he lost his sight at just 18 following an horrific car crash.

The 46 year old Tallaght man readily admits that he was full of the hubris of youth when the accident happened and this in itself was the key to his survival, and his eventual adaptation to his vastly changed new life. "I believe that life is what you make it, you can go under or you can fight. I chose to fight and I challenged myself every single day. I knew my sight was gone but I was here and I intended to make the best out of the cards I was dealt".

Fast forward several years and it is fair to say that Robbie rose to the 'challenge' and trained in various disciplines including Physical Therapy, Acupuncture and Yoga. He also trained in wood carving and believes he may be the only person who is blind in Ireland who does this.

"I believe that where there is a will, there is a way and you need to believe in yourself, be your own cheerleader".

Robbie has also written a book, 'Beyond the Darkness' which charts his own journey. Of course no matter how strong and determined a person is, no life is always lived in the sunshine and Robbie is honest when he talks about his brush with serious

depression, which hit him around five years ago.

"I was on holidays in Madagascar and I got a bad bug. I couldn't sleep and as we all know, when you're lying awake and everybody else is asleep, things become tricky and we go into our own minds. I got badly depressed and I attempted suicide as I just couldn't cope with this. Maybe I had been too strong for too long and something had to give. I don't know, no point in getting into analysis paralysis but it was horrendous. I would go so far as to say that on a scale of 1 to 10, for me, blindness was a 3 whereas the depression was a 10".

Thankfully Robbie's innate grit and resilience saw him through, and he is happy today as he has a busy working life and he throws himself into giving the best he can to the many clients who come to him.

He believes that the high unemployment rate amongst people with sight loss is "a shocking shame".

He says it has knock on effects which are much more than just the money that people with sight loss can earn and can lead to all sorts of problems for people.

"Look, depression taught me that work is so vital for our mental and physical health, not to mention our financial health. It gives a sense of purpose, achievement and belonging and we need to be demanding more for people with sight loss who want to and are well able to work".



**Robbie Dowdall with his guide dog Ace.**



“If only potential employers knew what they are missing. We can do so much and just need to be given a chance to show this. We’re well capable and employers are missing out on a valuable cohort of possible employees. There’s grants available to employers for making technology accessible to people with sight loss, there’s training , help, support and information available from NCBI, there’s no excuse for employers to disregard people with sight loss any more”.

Denis Daly, Employment Advisor with NCBI says there are lots of supports available for potential employers.

“NCBI is the natural point of contact for employers who want to hire people with visual impairments. We offer a full range of services including advice on available grants, assistive technology and disability training

and awareness. We assist people with varying levels of sight loss to retain their existing employment or retrain for new opportunities. We work with training institutions and Government services and liaise with HR, line managers and supervisors. Our Library and Media Centre converts written material and text books into Braille and audio formats so there is a whole depth to the help and support NCBI provides. It is often a surprise to employers that people with visual impairments can be so employable and with the advent of, and huge strides in assistive technology, their employability can only improve”.

# Vision Sports Ireland and Park Run Encourage VIP Runners

Two of Ireland's most prominent sports bodies Vision Sports Ireland (VSI) and Park Run are urging people with sight loss to get involved in sports activities, particularly running.

Speaking at a presentation of 100 Sighted Guide Identity Bibs, Joe Geraghty, National Development Officer, VSI said; "Vision Sports and

Parkrun are two vibrant national sports bodies whose goal is to promote health and wellbeing through sport. Parkrun welcome walkers and runners with vision impairment to their weekly Saturday runs nationwide. Vision Sports Ireland are delighted to present Parkrun Ireland with guide identity bibs. The bibs can be worn by volunteer guides to help other participants' awareness as they run, behind, alongside or pass out a vision impaired walker or runner."

Jason Smyth, known as the 'fastest Paralympian on the planet', a Board member at VSI said, "This is a fantastic initiative, it is vital to build awareness around sporting participation for visually impaired people. I have always loved sport and I am passionate about getting other people with sight loss involved. It has a whole host of benefits from physical health to mental health to emotional health". "Also you learn discipline, you make sacrifices, you gain confidence; all attributes



L-R: Joan Ryan, Karen Kealy, Jason Smith and Joe Geraghty.

that serve people well in life in general."

Joe Geraghty praised Parkrun for its cooperation with VSI. "As an Optometrist Joan Ryan has a keen interest in sight loss. Last September Joan watched VSI on RTE's Celebrity Operation Transformation. Seeds sown, Joan, an enthusiastic parkrunner, promoted improved participation among people who are blind and vision impaired. Soon she became the Republic of Ireland Visually Impaired Ambassador for Parkrun Ireland. We are so lucky to have Joan as our parkrun leader."

To get involved check out [www.parkrun.com](http://www.parkrun.com) and a Facebook group called 'Parkrun Ireland, for Parkrunners and walkers with Vision Impairment.'



# NCBI's National Tesco Bag-pack Is A Huge Success!

Tralee

Once again our National Tesco Bag pack was a great success with 61 bag packs taking place on April 14th. Thank you to everyone who volunteered on the day and donated. We have raised €28,967.33 to date — a remarkable achievement!

Are you interested in getting involved with our next NCBI Tesco Bag Pack? We are looking for volunteers to join us on Saturday 25th August 2018! If you have a couple of hours to give please contact Angela [angela.levins@ncbi.ie](mailto:angela.levins@ncbi.ie) / Collette [collette.mcentee@ncbi.ie](mailto:collette.mcentee@ncbi.ie)

## Balbriggan



**ABOVE: NCBI Tesco bag packing volunteers, Caroline and Ilona in Balbriggan.**

**RIGHT: Lisa Murphy, shop manager in NCBI Inchicore charity shop, packing at her local Tesco store.**



**NCBI Tralee charity shop manager Breda Sheehan with her fantastic volunteers.**

## Inchicore



# Upcoming NCBI Fundraising Events

## NCBI Cycle of Light – Friday 24th August 2018

NCBI Cycle of Light is back for its second year! This is a unique 85km night time cycling tour in and around Dublin city, shining a light for those living with sight loss and raising vital funds for NCBI's rehabilitation and children's services. For people living with sight loss little things like better lighting or the use of brightly coloured markings can make life simpler and safer – things every cyclist knows. Will you be joining us for this special fun and light filled night? Feel free to get in touch **contact Collette at [cycleoflight@ncbi.ie](mailto:cycleoflight@ncbi.ie) / 01 882 1970**



## NCBI Tesco Bag Pack – Saturday 25th August 2018

We are looking for volunteers to join our 3rd Annual Tesco Bag Pack Day! If you have a couple of hours to give please contact **Angela [angela.levins@ncbi.ie](mailto:angela.levins@ncbi.ie) / Collette [collette.mcentee@ncbi.ie](mailto:collette.mcentee@ncbi.ie)**



## NCBI Camino Way – Saturday 8th – Saturday 15th September 2018

Join NCBI for a 100km sponsored walk along the famous Camino de Santiago this September and help raise vital funds for thousands of people with sight loss. All abilities are welcome. Smiles and support are a given! Register today and start fundraising! For more info, **contact Collette [collette.mcentee@ncbi.ie](mailto:collette.mcentee@ncbi.ie)**



## Sky Dive 4 Sight Loss - Saturday 22nd & Sunday 23rd of September 2018

NCBI supporters will take to the skies in our annual Sky Dive 4 Sight Loss! Face your fears and fundraise! For more info, **contact Collette [collette.mcentee@ncbi.ie](mailto:collette.mcentee@ncbi.ie)**



For more info on any of the above or other fundraising queries or ideas, **contact Collette at [collette.mcentee@ncbi.ie](mailto:collette.mcentee@ncbi.ie) / 01 882 1970.**