

inSight

Magazine

Vol. 22, No. 2, Summer 2019



NCBI

Working for People
With Sight Loss

Sherif Awwal
who attends the
NCBI Training
Centre.



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NCBI inSight

(Incorporating *The Blind Citizen* 1923) is published four times a year by: NCBI, Whitworth Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 9. Tel: 01 830 7033 Fax: 01 8307 787

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Printed by: PB Print Solutions Tel: 353 86 2511640.

Global Accessibility Awareness



What a sighted person takes for granted in a website is not always the case for visually impaired people. As a sighted person, we can see images, labels printed on buttons and information displayed neatly in tables or other structures.

This is not the case for visually impaired people as often websites forget to label these in the Alt Text descriptions in their HTML code. HTML is an acronym for Hypertext Mark-up Language. All websites are built using this code. This code is read by the browser and converted into what people see on a webpage.

Screen Reader users (JAWS, NVDA, VoiceOver & Talkback) rely on this code being well labelled to make websites easy to navigate as well as make all parts of the websites readable to the end user. Many people with sight loss use magnification software while using websites. Websites should consider the layout, background contrast colour schemes, placement of buttons and links as well as labelling images and facility to enlarge font sizes.

If the Web Developer from the conception of a website carries out these simple

parameters then everyone has access to the information contained there and no one will be excluded.

The lack of accessibility has spilled in to other areas of technology such as ATM machines with touch screens that offer no spoken feedback making them unusable to people with little or no vision. Home cookers and ovens are becoming more flat screen controlled making them very difficult to use when you can't see the display. If awareness was improved there could be features put in place to make these devices also accessible to the visually impaired.

Companies such as Apple and Google include accessibility features in all of their mobile devices. iPhones and Android phones all have features that can enable on-screen magnification and colour alternating to make their phones more accessible. Also, they both have built-in screen readers that can be turned on. This allows a person with no sight at all to access all the features contained on the phones by using swipe gestures on the screen and listening to audio cues and thus allowing them access to everything a sighted person can do on a phone.

If awareness was improved and all industries and sectors were aware of these features that can be added to their technology, then more people would be included and able to use it more independently.

**See pages 20 - 23 for more
NCBI Technology News.**

Clear Our Paths Campaign

NCBI's Clear our Paths campaign was held during May 12th-19th 2019. The campaign urged members of the public to think about the obstacles on our footpaths that make safe and independent travel difficult for people with sight loss. These include cars parked on footpaths, wheelie bins, overhanging branches, dog litter, bicycles tied to poles and more recently election posters. Obstacles such as these can lead to injury and make each journey more difficult for someone with low or no vision.

Unsafe space

Members of the public are largely unaware of the implications of their actions. For example parking on a footpath for a quick dash into the shop, this leaves a person who is blind or vision impaired with no other choice but to walk out onto the road and into an unfamiliar and unsafe space.

As part of the campaign, we released a video showing the difficulties people with impaired vision face on a daily basis as they try to navigate their way through towns and cities countrywide. Watch the video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-aTsSn6_Kl&feature=youtu.be.

The sole aim of our campaign is to encourage everyone to play their part and keep footpaths clear of temporary obstacles which have a significant negative impact on the almost 55,000 people living with sight loss in Ireland. Simple actions such as cleaning up after their dogs, respecting



Noreen Carter encountering obstacles on her journey.

the traffic laws, not parking on footpaths, taking in their bins after collection and trimming overhanging branches. These are not onerous requests yet the difference they make to someone with sight loss is impossible to quantify.

Noreen Carter, an NCBI service user, gives an account of her daily journey to navigate the obstacles on the footpath:

“As I venture into town from my house I first encounter a bicycle on the footpath. I am grateful for my white cane. It is a lifesaver because one trip can change the course of my life and lead to further disability. I continue on and encounter a full wheelie bin right in the middle of the path. I have no choice but to step off the path and onto the road to get by. Further down the road, a huge briar hanging down gets caught in my hair. I am lucky it could have been my eye. A little distance on, there is a huge jeep totally blocking the path and once again I have to step off the path onto the road. And finally, disgustingly I slip on dog litter.

“Let’s have a stress-free and safe zone on our footpaths.”

I think if the general public were aware of their actions they would be more mindful. All of the above obstacles could have been avoided so that people who are blind and vision impaired could instead have had a pleasant and safe journey. Let’s have a stress-free and safe zone on our footpaths”.

Jackie McBrearty, an NCBI service advocate also explains:

“Approaching the summer months, the main obstacle on the footpath for me is overhanging branches of trees and hedges.



Wheelie bins are a common obstacle on Irish streets.



Street furniture and pavement signage can impede vision impaired pedestrians.

In Sligo town’s main street and housing estates, this is a particular problem. It’s an awful shock when I unexpectedly get scraped by a branch. On rubbish collection day, bins are often left randomly on the footpath after they have been emptied. This makes it harder for me to walk around.”

Getting Involved in our Campaign and Advocacy Work

If you have a vision impairment and are interested in playing a role in campaigning for change, we would be delighted to hear from you. NCBI wants to empower people who are blind and vision impaired to influence the decisions that affect them and ensure their inclusion in decision making processes.

We want to enable people with impaired vision to get involved in a range of advocacy and campaign initiatives with the support of our Policy and Advocacy team. This might involve participating in consultations and other events or sharing experiences through media outlets. You can pick and choose what you would like to get involved in.

We also provide a training course in campaign and lobbying skills to people with sight loss who would like to get actively involved. Our next session will be held in Athlone in September. The training is a mix of campaigning theory and hands-on exercises and it aims to be an enjoyable and fun experience for all. Participants will also have the opportunity to discuss the topics they are passionate about changing. It will also give participants the confidence to apply newly acquired skills in a practical way. The course is delivered over 2 days to allow sufficient time for activities and discussion. If you are interested in getting involved in our campaign and advocacy work, please

contact Niamh Connolly in our Policy and Advocacy Team on email: campaigns@ncbi.ie or Tel: 01 8307033.

Jackie McBrearty is a trained advocate with NCBI.

“I have very limited vision as a result of retinitis pigmentosa. I have perception of light in my left eye and no sight in my right eye. I lost my vision when I was 16 years old but with the encouragement of my family I became independent again and “got on with life”.

I live in Sligo town and went to Sligo Institute of Technology where I got a Degree in Social Care. I also have a Certificate in Disability Studies from St. Angela’s College. Despite my efforts, I have never worked. A good few years ago I linked in with what was then called FAS but no suitable placements were ever offered to me.

I am keen to campaign on access issues and I have talked to Sligo County Council and the Gardai on a number of occasions about access problems in Sligo town for people who are blind and vision impaired.

I find advocating on my own behalf to be very empowering. I am delighted that I got involved in NCBI’s campaign and lobbying work and I would encourage others to do so as well.”

Audio description in Irish Cinemas

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

An NCBI volunteer, Connie DiFusco kindly carried out a piece of research to find out which cinemas in Ireland currently offer audio description. In total, 40 cinemas were contacted throughout Ireland.

From our research, here is a list of cinemas that responded saying that they offer audio description. If there are other cinemas that offer audio description please do let us know at campaigns@ncbi.ie and we will add them to this list.

- Cineplex www.cineplex.com/Theatres/described-services .
- Cineworld www.cineworld.ie/audio-described .
- Eye Cinema Galway shows an audio described movie each Saturday afternoon.
- Irish Film Institute Dublin www.ifi.ie/accessible .
- Odeon www.odeoncinemas.ie/accessibility/sight-impaired-guests/ or call the helpline: **00800 4582 4582**.
- Vue Dublin www.myvue.com or call **1890 800 705** and press **0** when you're connected to go through to the next available staff member.

Making RTE More Accessible – Have your say!



Dee Forbes, Director General RTÉ.

NCBI has been actively working with RTÉ on a number of accessibility issues for viewers who are blind and vision impaired. This includes discussions around the accessibility of the RTÉ Player, the accessibility of RTÉ's website and consulting with viewers who are blind and vision impaired about their accessibility needs and requirements.

We are pleased to inform you that RTÉ is going to conduct a pilot study to find out about the needs of people who are blind and vision impaired. This study aims to find out what people like and don't like in terms of RTÉ content on television, online and the RTÉ player. There will be questions about people's lifestyle, what people are interested in and media habits. This is a really great opportunity and we are actively seeking participants to get involved.

If you would like to participate in this study, please contact Niamh Connolly in NCBI Policy and Advocacy Team on Tel: **01 8307033** or email: campaigns@ncbi.ie .

Our Asks of European Election Candidates

In the lead up to the European elections, we asked election candidates and their parties to comply with the electoral law and ensure that all election posters be placed at a minimum of 2.1 metres (7 foot) from the ground. NCBI saw multiple examples of this requirement being ignored.

We also called on political parties to make information relating to the European elections accessible to people who are blind and vision impaired, so that they too can participate in the political process in a fair and equal manner. This included political parties' websites, apps and written information.

We also made a number of other asks, outlined below.

Accessibility

While the European Accessibility Act has made a lot of progress in terms of accessibility, unfortunately it does not focus at all on the accessibility of the built environment, public urban transport and household appliances. We urge the European Parliament to ask the Commission to prepare legislative initiatives to promote accessibility around these issues.

The Web Accessibility Directive also does not apply to the websites and apps of EU institutions. We expect the European Parliament in particular to set an example and make every effort to make their websites

and apps accessible.

Audio Description

The EU funding for the film industry should be used to ensure that more films being produced have audio description. We are asking the European Parliament to make audio description a mandatory requirement for support under Creative Europe Media, the EU's funding instrument for cross-border film productions.

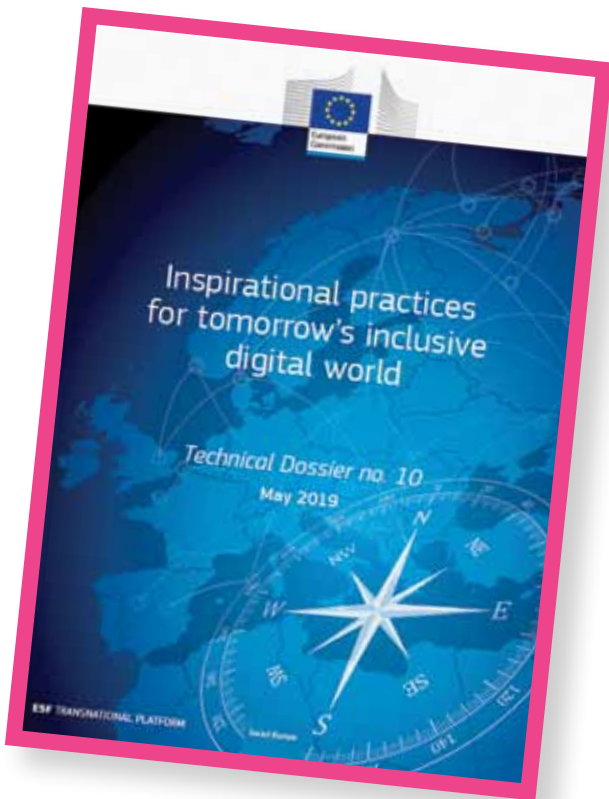
EU Disability Card

The EU Disability Card which provides access for people with disabilities, including those who are blind and vision impaired, to a range of museums and cultural sites as well as transport is currently still just a pilot phase Commission project. It has only been implemented on a voluntary basis by eight EU countries.

We call on the European Parliament to push for the further roll out of this initiative, and to allow all EU citizens the opportunity to have access to a card that recognises their disability status and therefore equal access to related services.

European Parliament Disability Intergroup

The Disability Intergroup is an informal cross-country and cross-party grouping of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) who are interested in promoting disability policy in their work.



We are asking future Irish MEPs to participate in this, in order to be better informed about the impact and possibilities of EU policies on people with disabilities including those who are blind and vision impaired in Ireland.

Independent mobility

In its Third Mobility Package, the European Commission committed to an increase in automated driving, for private and public transportation. Connected and autonomous or self-driving vehicles can greatly enhance the independent mobility of people who are blind and vision impaired while at the same time, as pedestrians, they pose particular threats to the safety of this same cohort.

We call on the European Parliament to inform the Commission about the needs and concerns of people who are blind and vision impaired at the start of any future legislative proposals in this regard.

Our Concerns about the Tactile Ballot Paper Templates

The Tactile Voting Templet developed for the Elections in May, 2019.



NCBI expressed concerns that people who are blind and vision impaired would be unable to vote independently in the local and European election in May, despite the availability of tactile ballot paper templates.

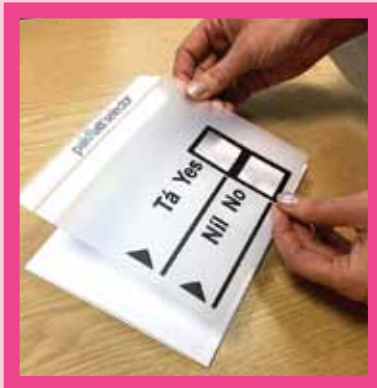
While we recognise the strides undertaken by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to introduce tactile templates following the April 2017 High Court ruling, the reality is, given there were multiple polls it meant that voters who are blind and vision impaired had to use three tactile templates, something which was likely to prove confusing for many.

Also, the final list of candidates was not known until three weeks in advance of polling, making it virtually impossible to have the free phone numbers and online resources available in a timely fashion to allow voters to familiarise themselves with the candidates running in their locality.

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The Tactile Voting Templet developed for the Referendum in May, 2019.



The Department did engage with NCBI and a number of other disability groups in a sincere and collaborative fashion to make the tactile ballot paper templates as accessible as possible. However, it is essential that the Department now gives serious consideration to alternative means of voting for people who are blind and vision impaired.

NCBI believes the only truly independent means for a person with impaired vision to cast their ballot is either by telephone or electronically. Negative experiences with electronic voting in the past cannot be allowed to prevent the almost 55,000 people living with sight loss from exercising their right to a secret ballot. NCBI looks forward to engaging constructively with the Department as part of the existing Working Group on Accessible Voting to make this a reality in the years ahead.

If you have any feedback on how you think the template worked or didn't work and any suggested improvements, we would be delighted to hear from you. Please send your feedback to campaigns@ncbi.ie or contact Niamh Connolly in the Policy and Advocacy Team on Tel: 01 8307033.

International Albinism Awareness Day (#laad 2019)



People from Ireland invited to attend 'This is Me,' the next Albinism Fellowship conference

Adults with albinism and parents of children with this rare genetic condition living in Ireland are invited to find out more about the Albinism Fellowship's next conference, which is in Derbyshire this autumn.



Rosaleen Dempsey.

With the theme of 'This is Me', the conference – from 18-20 October - offers a mix of educational sessions, socialising and entertainment to meet the needs of people with this condition, which includes severe visual impairment.

Conference sessions at The Hayes Conference Centre, in the village of Swanwick, Afreton, Derbyshire, will include information on some of the payments people with disabilities receive, using technology to overcome visual impairment, playing sports with a visual impairment and helping parents get the most out of their children's VI teacher.

Although several smaller events occur around Ireland, the conference is an opportunity to meet the wider Albinism community and find out more about the latest research. The programme is

bigger than ever before, and it's a great chance for individuals and families affected by albinism to catch up in person. Families and individuals from all parts of Ireland usually travel to play an active part in the Albinism Fellowship UK and Ireland conferences.

So we would actively encourage more adults with albinism and parents of children with the condition to come along to this year's conference.

Albinism affects approximately 3,000 people living in the UK and Ireland and is passed on via an autosomal recessive inheritance pattern. As well as having severe short sight, and often nystagmus and

photophobia, people with albinism have distinctive white hair and pale skin.

The Albinism Fellowship is the charity representing people with albinism in both the UK and Ireland.

For more information on the conference, please contact Rosaleen Dempsey, Ireland Co-ordinator for the Albinism Fellowship, at <http://albinism.org.uk/conferences.php>.

Online bookings are available at: <http://www.123formbuilder.com/form-4742009/albinism-fellowship-2019>.

The Country Girls at the Abbey Theatre

On Saturday 6th April, over 20 people who are blind or vision impaired and regular theatre goers attended the Abbey Theatre in Dublin to experience the Audio Described (AD) version of Edna O'Brien's Country Girls before it set off on a nationwide tour. The Play was Written and adapted by Edna O'Brien and directed by Graham McLaren.



The NCBI group at The Country Girls.

This coming of age story of two young women in 1950s Ireland became a best seller. The Abbey Players gave their audience a great insight into the lives of these ground breaking female characters and how they lived in Dublin and London during the 1950s and 1960s.

The group also included 3 guide dogs, some members of NCBI staff and other AD enthusiasts. The group received a back-stage tour of the set and the chance to speak with some of the actors.

For the performance, all were allocated AD

headsets to assist in the appreciation of the "carry on" during the play. With the help of the AD describers the group could follow the play effortlessly. Also having Edna O'Brien read out key lines from the book added greatly to the overall experience.

Not surprisingly, everyone in the group left the Abbey in high spirits and all looking forward to returning again to our National Theatre for the next Audio Described show.

Peer Support —the Essence of Giving

inSight Magazine recently spoke to NCBI service user, Alistair Clews who has benefitted from attending the NCBI Training Centre and the professional and peer support which he has received there. — June Tinsley reports.

Alistair Clews is 51 years of age. He was born with a condition called Retinitis Pigmentosa, it is a genetic condition that leads to the gradual degeneration of the retina. Many people who have this condition are fully blind by his age, so he considers himself lucky that the degeneration has been very slow and he is grateful to retain some vision. His optician has told him that it is unlikely he will go fully blind now. Alistair has no vision in his right eye but retains some decent central vision in his left eye, but no periphery vision. He wears glasses with strong lens.

NCBI Employment Services

“My condition didn’t really bother me as a child. I had to sit in the front of the class to see the blackboard, but it didn’t stop me doing the usual things in childhood. It didn’t affect me when I was working. I worked as a manager in the retail sector for many years — I only left five years ago. My vision was getting worse, I was tripping over things or bumping into things. I linked in with NCBI Employment Services who tried to work with my employer to enable me to keep my job by modifying my work place but, unfortunately, the company wasn’t receptive to changing, so I had to resign. I did take them to the Employment Appeals Tribunal and won which was some relief after a very difficult period.

Alistair joined the NCBI Training Centre which he found really valuable as he was finding it hard being out of work. The Training Centre gave him the opportunity to try new things, get re-trained and meet new people. As soon as he joined he loved it. He attends two days a week and undertakes a range of courses.

Mobility Training

“I like that you can make the timetable your own and you decide what classes to do, depending on your own interests. They always want you to focus on what you are going to do when you leave and identify your goals. In some cases it is further education, in others it can be to do things for yourself which you might not have been able to do before — even something as simple as making a dinner. I did the mobility training to learn how to get around by myself confidently, instead of relying on other people, which is a huge thing for someone with sight loss.

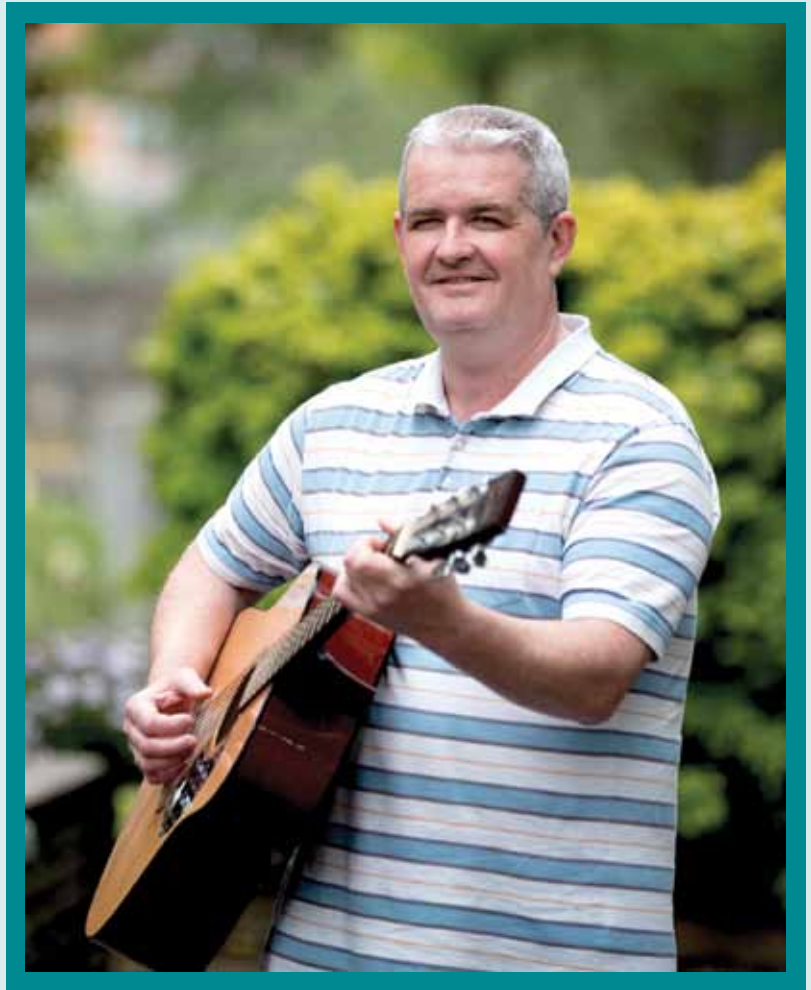
“The mobility training is really practical and useful. Having a full time mobility officer is brilliant, as you get that one-to-one training. Personally I don’t need the long cane but I do use a cymbal cane to let people know I am visually impaired. I was initially reluctant to use it because I was very self-conscious but realised it is important especially if I accidentally bump into someone, they are more understanding when they see me with a cane. Carrying that stick is like my security blanket; but if it wasn’t for the Training Centre I wouldn’t be using one.

Alistair found the Self-Advocacy Class really good because it offers space to share the daily challenges experienced by those who are visually impaired. The Self-Advocacy training empowers people and gives them confidence. He also found that the yoga class was great for balance and peace of mind.

“I also completed the ECDL course and because I have some vision I can use a computer without using Zoom text or JAWS. I did Braille for a while but I think it is something you need to learn rather than want to learn. I found it hard because with my little vision I could see the dots so I was reading Braille with sight not by touch and that was frustrating. I found the Braille keyboard much easier to use.

In the Training Centre you meet people who are in the same boat as yourself and you can be yourself. There is no judgement. We have someone to talk to, to bounce ideas and learn off each other. I know I have learnt just as much from other visually impaired people here than participating in the direct classes. Everybody has their own story to tell with some being blind from birth, to others who have lost their sight suddenly or later in life. It builds our own self confidence then.

Alistair is delighted that he will return to the NCBI Training Centre in September to



Alistair Clews.

commence teaching guitar to the students and help out with the peer support work too.

“I’ve played the guitar for years and felt that music was missing from the list of classes on offer, so I suggested I start teaching guitar at the centre and NCBI have embraced that suggestion and even bought a few guitars for students to learn on. I started a few weeks ago and those who take the class are loving it. The Training Centre was been the lifeline I needed and I am thrilled to be still involved with it.”

Fit4All — Fun for All!

On Thursday 9th May, the Iona Resource Centre participated in the Nationwide Fit4All week.

Fit4All is a Cara initiative, aimed at increasing opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in their local leisure or fitness centre. Over 95 centres throughout Ireland participated in Fit4All week, with activities varying from Zumba classes to karate.

At the Iona Resource Centre we provide a specialised individual programme for the service users we support which enables us to support persons aged from 18 – 94+.

The individual is at the core of the service we deliver. Enabling them to play an active role in their local community is important, as assisting individuals to be independent and live a fulfilled life is central to our work. Fit4All therefore was an initiative that we felt passionate about, as health and wellbeing is embedded into all aspects of our service.

Our service users had the opportunity to participate in Blind Golf, Blind Football and Goal Ball. Two representatives from Irish Blind Golf; Pat and Patrick Morgan gave an informative talk about golf which certainly motivated and inspired our service users. They had the opportunity to practise their pitch and putting skills and many were certainly interested in learning new skills and taking up a new sport. Blind Football and Goal Ball were also of interest to our service users and Goal Ball certainly inspired our service users and they are keen to start up



ABOVE, Instructors Pat and Patrick Morgan talk about Blind Golf to service users at the NCBI Iona Centre.

their own team! As Brian McGurran said “I love it and keeping fit is so important. I didn’t realise that there was so many things that I can do, and being part of Iona Resource Centre Shapeshifters fitness event and this event today has helped me to realise that I can do a lot more”.

At the Iona Resource Centre we take a varied approach to providing day opportunities. We are in the heart of the local community and ensure we have connections in your community for your benefit. We offer an impressive range of activities designed to engage, motivate and challenge our service users.

James Flanagan our Fitness and Recreation Instructor undertakes a detailed assessment which enables him to make a bespoke fitness programme for the individual. James is also keen to forge links with the Dublin community for health and well-being initiatives, which our Shapeshifters event is focused on, as well as



ABOVE, L-R: Instructor Pat Morgan coaching Brian McGurran at the NCBI Iona Centre.

overcoming any obstacles in life to achieve your goal. As the Shapeshifters motto explains: “The body achieves what the mind believes”.

If you have any queries or would like further information about the Iona Resource Centre, please do not hesitate to contact **Maggie Richardson** on 01 830 4014 or email: Maggie.richardson@ncbi.ie. You can also follow the NCBI Iona Resource Centre on Facebook to see our latest events and news.

Children’s Services

A number of NCBI workshops for children and young people took place during the Easter break around the country, these included:

- A school readiness workshop in Tallaght which was aimed at preschool children

and their parents to help prepare for the big move to primary school. The workshop focussed on developing self-care and independence skills as well as social and communication skills.

- Assistive Technology workshops took place in Mayo for students at primary and second level to build on existing skills, expand on the range of access solutions and improve overall efficiency and confidence in using technology.
- Two workshops in the South focused on independent living and travel skills for students at primary school level with the additional focus of future planning needs for these students at secondary school level.
- A two-day workshop in the Midlands took place for students in primary school on independent living skills, looking specifically at meal preparation, travel and organisation skills.
- In the Mid-West children preparing for the transition to secondary school were facilitated in a two-day event with a visit to a secondary school included.

Camp Abilities

NCBI celebrated its ongoing partnership with Camp Abilities as part of its 10th year anniversary in Kerry in April. Camp abilities hosted 40 children at its week-long sports and recreation camp in Killorglin with children attending from Cork to Donegal! The children got to try a range of sports including kayaking, rock climbing, abseiling, athletics, tennis and judo.

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Aoife Buckley and Hilary Devlin, NCBI's reps, were on hand to provide advice and training to staff and volunteers on the needs of the children attending and how to adopt different instruction techniques tailored to the needs of those with vision impairment to ensure full participation of the children in the sports.



ABOVE, L-R:
Campability and NCBI Staff and volunteers at at the recreation camp at Killorglin.



LEFT, Children from Cork and Donegal with trainers and volunteers at the recreation camp at Killorglin.

NCBI's Eye Clinic Liaison Officer Programme

The NCBI is delighted to begin its Eye Clinic Liaison Officer (ECLO) Programme. This programme could provide a much-needed service to both eye clinic patients, their families and carers and will be based in Temple Street Hospital, the Royal Victoria

Eye and Ear Hospital and in the Mater Hospital.

The NCBI has consistently expressed concern at the impact of ophthalmology waiting lists on the health and wellbeing of the more than 42,500 people who continue to face long delays in accessing sight-saving treatments and care. This in turn leads to delays in referrals to NCBI services for people who are experiencing significant

deterioration in their sight and are struggling to remain independent. For 62% of patients wait times extend longer than 6 months, 41% over 12 months, and 28% waiting over 18 months.

The benefit of the ECLO programme is it sits at the forefront of service delivery, receiving direct referrals from clinicians and acts as a point of further referral for patients and families to vision rehabilitation services and essential community based supports. Alongside referrals to the NCBI lifecycle teams, the ECLO provides timely emotional support and further advice and information on eye conditions to patients within the acute setting.

Since starting this programme, already the number of referrals is increasing. **For further information please contact: Elaine.crossan@ncbi.ie or phone 01 830 7033.**

National Volunteer Appreciation week 2019

Thank you so much NCBI Retail Volunteers

NCBI Retail is proud to have over 900 volunteers helping us in 115 shops nationwide. We have some of the most fantastic volunteers, who go above and beyond, to make sure NCBI can open the shops each day. Their combination of enthusiasm, dedication, local knowledge and energy means they are the lifeline of our stores in the communities.

Every hour our volunteers give, directly helps NCBI to deliver emotional supports and rehabilitation training to thousands of children and adults with sight loss in Ireland. Below are some of our many volunteers to whom we say a big thank you.

A BIG THANK YOU to the many NCBI Volunteers from around the country who make a generous contribution to the services we provide to blind and vision impaired people.



Sight loss and complex needs

NCBI have been conscious of the need to develop and extended our services to adults with intellectual disabilities given the fact that people with intellectual disability are 10 times more likely to experience vision loss than the general population.

We have started a series of Training Workshops with service providers in Cork during May and this will extend nationwide over the coming months. The focus of the workshop is to increase the knowledge around vision loss – addressing areas such as:

- Importance of eye care
- Impact of vision loss
- How to identify different types of vision loss
- Provision of practical solutions and strategies that can be implemented
- When to refer to more specialised services

Rehabilitation in partnership with Intellectual Disability service providers is the key message as we try to extend our reach and provide improved services to a presently underserved population with vision loss.

NCBI celebrates opening over 100 shops



L-R: Robbie Henshaw, NCBI Ambassador and Chris White, CEO, at the official opening of NCBI shop in Rathmines.

In April, NCBI opened its latest retail shop in Rathmines, Dublin. NCBI now has 100 shops across the country. The shops play a vital part in the charity's overall fundraising efforts, allowing the agency to provide services to over 8,000 people each year.

Robbie Henshaw, NCBI Ambassador who attended the opening, said "I've seen first-hand the difference that NCBI makes in supporting and enabling people to live independently and confidently."

Chris White, NCBI CEO said "we are delighted to have a store in Rathmines and hope the NCBI store will become a cornerstone of the community as it has in so many other communities across the country. We are heartened to see the ongoing growth of our stores and the important part they play as demand for NCBI services grow."

Connemara Marathon Men



Connemara Marathon men Ross Elwood and his friend Conor Melly who raised €915 for NCBI.

Netta does it for NCBI



A BIG THANK YOU to Netta and Paddy who did their Annual Pancake Tuesday fundraiser. They raised an amazing €1,530.94 for NCBI.

NCBI Working for People with Sight Loss

Sponsored by FUJITSU

Cycle of Light

A unique 80 km or 60 km night time cycling tour of Dublin shining a light for those living with sight loss and raising vital funds for The National Council For The Blind's rehabilitation and children's services.

Friday 6th September
From 7.30pm until dark

From Dalkey to Howth and home around the city

For the full route and to register visit ncbi.ie

NCBI Working for People with Sight Loss

NCBI - Camino - 2019

Join NCBI for our annual sponsored walk along the ancient pilgrim route, the Camino de Santiago, this September and help raise vital funds for thousands of people with sight loss.

Valença to Santiago De Compostela (The Portuguese Way)
15th - 21st September

For more information or to register contact Joanne McCarney today!

Joanne.McCarney@ncbi.ie
01 882 1970

www.ncbi.ie

Microsoft Partners with Be My Eyes to Offer Specialized Help to its Blind and Low Vision customers

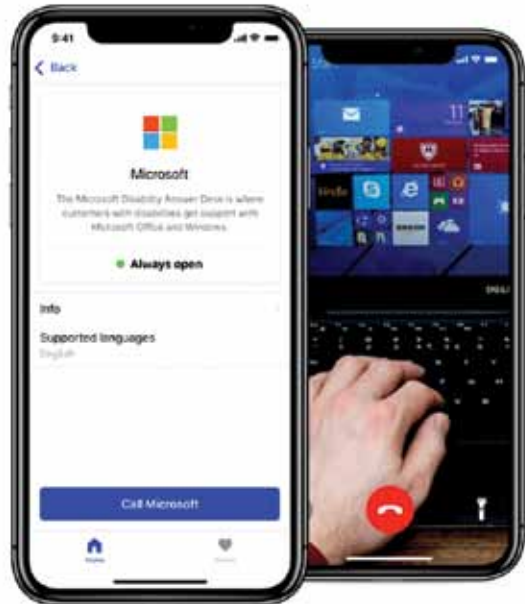
Be My Eyes is a free application, available on iOS and Android, designed to help people with sight loss receive assistance from a sighted volunteer via a live video call.

The app works by allowing a blind or vision impaired user make a connection with a volunteer through a video call in order to help solve day to day tasks such as cooking, finding lost items, catching a bus, reviewing mail and more. In one remarkable instance a Be My Eyes volunteer received a call from a vision impaired couple who needed help identifying the reading on a device they had used for a pregnancy test. The pregnancy was confirmed!

With over 900,000 users across 150 countries, Be My Eyes has grown to become the largest online community people with sight loss.

Recently, the Microsoft Disability Answer Desk, a service offering customers with disabilities support for Microsoft Office and Windows, announced a partnership with Be My Eyes to provide 24 hours, 7 days a week assistance to its blind and vision impaired customers.

The app will work the same, connecting customers through video; but instead of reaching out to volunteers, customers will work directly with a member of the Microsoft



Disability Answer Desk to receive support on questions about their Microsoft product or service.

According to Hans Jørgen Wiberg, creator of Be My Eyes, “Contacting customer support through email or by phone isn’t always ideal. Direct communication with a business’s customer support agent could be a more vision-friendly alternative and less time consuming for you. If someone from the company could see the issue in real time, issues with their products or services could be resolved more efficiently.”

Now, when users update the app, they will see the new Specialized Help menu.

To download the free Be My Eyes app, visit the Apple iOS store or the Google Play store.

Orbit Reader

20: A Low-Cost Breakthrough in Refreshable Braille

Braille is an incredibly empowering tool for people with sight loss, opening many doors to literacy, education and employment. However, Braille on paper is costly because it takes up more space than the printed word. Braille displayed on an electronic display with dots that pop up and down to form characters is a less costly alternative.

Significant Cost Reduction

Since the release of first refreshable braille display in 1982, the downside to such devices has been the extremely high cost — too expensive for many braille readers to afford. With the development of the Orbit Reader 20, however, the cost of a display has been reduced significantly.

Launched during National Braille Week in September 2018, the Orbit Reader 20 is a unique 3-in-1 device, about the size and weight of single hardback novel. Equipped with a 20-cell 8-dot display, with connection to a computer or smartphone via USB or Bluetooth. It has the capacity to store thousands of books, It enables the user to read any file directly from an SD card,

As a braille display: the Orbit Reader connects to PCs and Macs, iOS devices and Android devices. It provides Bluetooth and USB connectivity and can connect



Orbit Reader 20.

simultaneously to multiple devices. Using the screen reading capability on a mobile device, such as Voiceover, or popular PC screen readers such as Jaws or NVDA, the user can control the functions of their smartphone or computer, use their favourite apps, read and send text messages and email and browse the internet. As a note-taker, the Orbit Reader offers all essential file creation and editing functions.

Until now refreshable braille products, at circa €5,000, have been out of the reach many people with sight loss. The Orbit Reader, which is currently available to buy from NCBI for €768.75, significantly reduces the cost of refreshable braille, making it affordable to those who may not have been able to enjoy this technology previously. Perhaps, most importantly though, it further proves that technology is here to enhance the braille reading experience, not replace it.

More information

To find out more about the Orbit Reader 20 or to arrange a demonstration please call NCBI on 01-8307033.

Bone Conduction Headphones

Bone conduction is a technology used in hearing loss where the cochlear bone is stimulated with vibrations to carry sound information directly to the hearing centres in the brain. If the ear canal is damaged and in-ear hearing aids can't be used then cochlear implants or cochlear conduction devices are used to bypass the ear.

How does this technology help the visually impaired?

With the development of Bluetooth Bone Conducting Headphones visually impaired people can use these earphones to hear devices such as smart phones and tablets while still being fully aware of noises from their environment.

If using a smart phone's GPS for directions, these would be read through the Bone Conductive earphones the ears would be free to hear traffic sounds or traffic light signals. Another example would be while using a PC with a Screen Reader such as JAWS or NVDA. The on-screen information would be read through the Bone Conduction Headphones and the ears would be free to hear other sounds, without having to remove the headphones. Similarly, while using a PC the wearer could hear the doorbell ring or any other household alarms or notifications.

These headphones can be bought through NCBI Head Office (01- 830 7033) with prices starting from €68 for the wired and no microphone model, up to €166 for the wireless bluetooth model.



Typical Bone Conduction Headphones

Making photos more accessible and inclusive on Instagram and Facebook

Alt-Text

HTML is the acronym for Hypertext Mark-up Language and is utilised by web designers to build websites. Alt-Text is an HTML attribute used to describe the appearance and function of an image on a webpage. Adding alternative text to photos is first and foremost a principle of web accessibility. Vision-impaired users using screen readers will be read an alt attribute to understand an on-page image better. Websites designed with accessibility and inclusion in mind will have an Alt-Text description for every image. Sadly, this is often not the case for many websites.

In the last few years, Facebook introduced an Artificial Intelligence algorithm, which scans uploaded pictures and attempts to describe the contents of the image.

While this algorithm works quite well, it can often give rudimentary descriptions or descriptions too vague to be useful for those who are visually impaired to fully understand the image being portrayed.

Manual Alt-Text Editors for Facebook and Instagram.

Very recently, both Facebook and Instagram have added the option to add your own Alt-Text to images as you upload them. These new features allow social media users to be more inclusive by giving them the ability to add “meaningful” descriptions of images they upload to these platforms thus creating an accessible image to share with family and friends with a visual impairment.

Hopefully other platforms will follow suit enabling people to be more mindful when sharing images to add a description that allows people with vision impairments access to images that you share.

How to Activate Alt-text editor: Facebook

Currently, Facebook only offers the Alt-text editor in the full website version. After selecting an image to upload and before publishing the photo to Facebook:

1. Navigate to an edit option for the photo.
2. Navigate to the Alt-Text option.
3. Navigate to the “Override generated Alt-Text button”. From there we can fill out a text field describing the image and select the save button.

4. You will be brought back to the normal upload screen from where you can select the share button.

Instructions that are more detailed can't be given at this time, as the feature could be different from one person's set-up to another. We hope to see this feature added to the mobile versions of the Facebook app in the future.

How to Activate Alt-text editor: Instagram

Instagram currently offer their Alt-text editor in their mobile app.

After the images are selected and you choose a filter before publishing there is an advanced setting feature that can be accessed. In these advanced settings, there is a “Write Alt-Text” section, which allows us to describe the image before posting to an Instagram account.

NCBI Technical Support

Our Technical Support team are happy to help with any technical issues which you run into with any of our products. We also offer advice for anyone seeking advice before purchasing technology.

You can contact the support team by telephone (1850 923 060) or by email (support@ncbi.ie).

Foundation's Calendar of Events 2019

23 JUN



NCBI Des Cullen Classic & Vintage Car Show, Sunday 23rd June

6 SEPT



NCBI Cycle of Light
Friday 6th September

Cycle of Light



7 SEPT

Dublin Awareness Walk
Saturday 7th September



15 SEPT



Holmpatrick & Granard Cup, The All-Ireland Final,
Sunday 15th September, Balbriggan Golf Club



15-21 SEPT



NCBI Camino Walk
Sunday 15th to Saturday 21st September



28 SEPT

Tesco Bag Pack
Saturday 28th September

TESCO
Every little helps



6 OCT

Trip to TIPP
Sunday 6th October



DEC



NCBI Christmas Hampers,
Cards and Crackers

2019



Sky Dive 4 Sight Loss
Ongoing/ All year round



CALL US 01 8307033