

inSight Magazine

Vol. 26, No. 4. Winter 2023

**Vision
Ireland**
the new name for **NCBI**

Empowering
people who are
blind or vision impaired

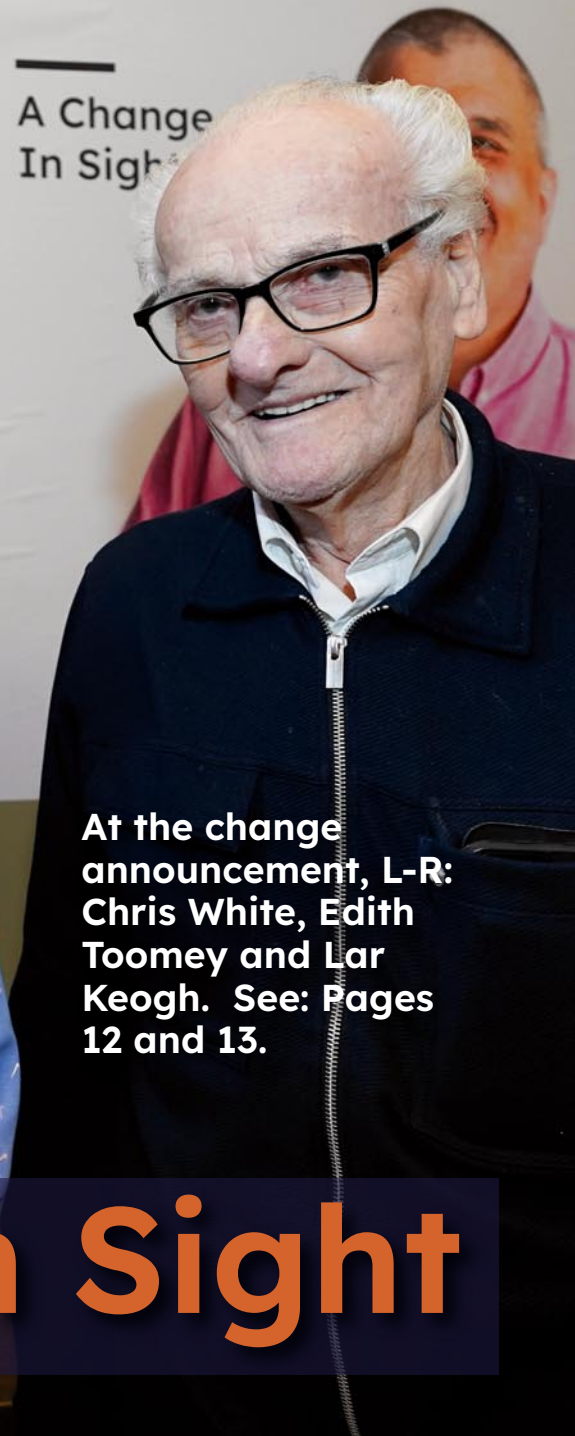
Vision Ireland
the new name for **NCBI**

Change
Sight



Vision Ireland
the new name for **NCBI**

A Change
In Sight



At the change
announcement, L-R:
Chris White, Edith
Toomey and Lar
Keogh. See: Pages
12 and 13.

A Change in Sight

inSight Contents:

Policy & Advocacy

Pages 3 - 4

- Clear our Paths 2023 Campaign round-up.
- Lord Mayor visits National Training Centre in Dublin.



Services

Pages 5 - 10

- Counselling award nomination.
- Children's Bereavements Books.
- Santa accessible letters!
- Nataliia and Artem's journey.
- Vision Sports Ireland round-up.



Profile

Pages 12 - 13

- Vision Ireland launches its new name. See the full report of the announcement on pages 12 and 13.



Foundation

Pages 11 - 15

- Golf round-up.
- Vision Walk 2023.
- New Look.
- London Dinner.
- Tree of Light.
- Kilkenny Fundraiser.
- Peter Ryan — Late, Late Show.
- Duck Derby fundraiser.



Retail

Pages 16 - 18

- Ballinasloe, Limerick and Mullingar store openings.
- Vision Ireland to rebrand its 124 stores.
- ForSight aids Belfast Depaul.



Technology

Pages 19 -24

- Amazon AI Conference.
- Vision Academy Launched.
- Google Outlook is getting some new features.
- Be My AI — Rolling out now!



inSight Magazine

(Incorporating **The Blind Citizen** 1923) is published four times a year by: Vision Ireland, Whitworth Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 9 DO9 RP70
Tel: 01 830 7033 Fax: 01 8307 787 email: info@vi.ie
website www.visionireland.ie
Editor: Frank Callery, Mobile 087 6724097, email: f.callery@gmail.com
Printed by: PB Print Solutions, Tel: 353 86 2511640.

Clear our Paths 2023 Campaign Round-up

Vision Ireland ran its annual Clear Our Paths Campaign again this year from 21st to 25th August.

The aim of this campaign is to remind and urge the public and businesses to play their part in ensuring people who are blind or vision impaired can navigate safely and confidently on footpaths. It focuses on the impact temporary obstacles can pose to those living with sight loss, for example:

- cars parked on footpaths,
- overhanging branches,
- dog fouling,
- street furniture not cordoned off,
- wheelie bins strewn on paths,
- cycles and e-scooters.

This year we secured a total of 203 media pieces, 33 of which were interviews on both national and local broadcasters. This is a significant increase from 2022. Many of the media opportunities were done in partnership with our advocates who generously shared their own personal lived experiences.

Sharing the results of the survey in which participants identified the obstacles they come across most frequently and gave details of injuries they have received as a result of them was very powerful.

The campaign even caught the attention of the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Daithí de Róiste, who invited Vision Ireland staff and advocates to The Mansion House to discuss how he could help to make Dublin



L-R: Madeleine McNamara, Deirdre Deverell, Guide Dog Bruno, The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Daithí de Róiste, Martina Gibney and Chris White, CEO, Vision Ireland.

more accessible for people who are blind or vision impaired.

The campaign was seen or heard by over 18 million people, meaning the entire population of Ireland saw or heard about it a few times during the week!

We are delighted to announce that the Clear our Paths campaign 2023 was recently shortlisted for an award in the Education Community Category at the annual Leading Lights in Road Safety awards which is organised by the Road Safety Authority of Ireland. Minister of State Jack Chambers will announce the winners of each category later in December.

Thank you to everyone who helped to make this year's campaign so successful.

Lord Mayor visits the National Training Centre in Dublin



The Lord Mayor of Dublin Daithí de Róiste with Vision Ireland staff and service users at the NTC.

Daithí de Róiste, the Lord Mayor of Dublin, visited Vision Ireland’s National Training Centre (NTC) on Tuesday, the 14th of November. Together with learners and tutors from the NTC, he walked the full length of Whitworth Road, meeting people at key points along the way to discuss accessibility challenges for people who are blind or visually impaired.

The four key talking points of the walk were smooth, clean, and clear paths with enough space to move, turn and be guided; clear tactile guidelines and delineators from the road to support safety; enhanced protection from overhanging branches, street obstacles, clutter, dog fouling and broken fences (especially at the bus stop); and finally, safer road crossings.

Lord Mayor de Róiste said after the walk-through on Whitworth Road. “It was illuminating to meet so many service users and encounter the broad spectrum of issues that they have to deal with daily.

Considering the number of service users that use this road and use this location every day and every week, one would think that it should be in an exemplary state. But it is not. Looking at the state of parts of the pathway, tactile pavement, the overhanging branches that people are walking into, the wheelie bins that are out in the road and realising the difference it makes for people with sight loss.”

He added: “I believe it is the responsibility of all of us to make the city better for everybody, so all of us can navigate it, and fully enjoy it every day”.

The visit ended with the morning tea, where the Lord Mayor met with a large group of NTC learners to talk more about the challenges they face.

Counselling award nomination

Vision Ireland's Counselling, Wellbeing and Emotional Support team have been hard at work over the last 18 months in expanding the service to help people in a variety of different ways.



In 2023, the service has doubled the amount of clients compared to the year before. It currently supports 91 service users through the Connection Network. The service partnered with Action for Happiness to deliver three "Exploring What Matters" wellbeing courses and run a peer group, "10 Keys to Happiness".

The team delivered four in-person nature connection events alongside a series of online workshops with Nature Therapy Ireland. Most recently, the team collaborated with Vision Ireland's Library Access service, the ICBN and St Francis Hospice to produce a range of audio and Braille resources for children and parents.

To be able to run the service and events so successfully, and to have gotten such great feedback from those who took part, is a testament to the impact the service is having on service users.

Such is the success of the Counselling,

Wellbeing and Emotional Support Service and the dedication from the entire team, the service and team have been nominated for a big award in the 2023 Irish Healthcare Awards. The team were nominated in the Mental Health Initiative of the Year category for all the brilliant work they do within the service. This is a huge achievement.

The full shortlist for the awards ceremony is available on the Irish Healthcare Awards website if you'd like to take a look.

The team will find out whether they secured the award at the awards evening on Tuesday 5th December at the Dublin Royal Convention Centre.

Fingers crossed they can take it home. Well done to all involved!

Children's Bereavements books



Vision Ireland, ICBN and St Francis Hospice teams at the launch of the accessible books.

Vision Ireland, in collaboration with St Francis Hospice and the Irish Childhood Bereavement Network (ICBN), has made available six new Braille and audio resources for children who are dealing with the loss of a loved one.

The launch of the accessible versions of the books coincided with the ICBN's Bereaved Children's Awareness Campaign. The original versions of the books, "Finding your way through grief: For teenagers and young adults" and "Always in My Heart: A book for children about grieving", were developed by the social work team of St Francis Hospice in collaboration with some of the young people attending the hospice for bereavement support, and their parents. In addition, Vision Ireland has converted three picture books, Badger's Parting Gifts, The Heart and the Bottle and The Invisible String into Braille and audio formats, as well as ICBN's guidance leaflet for parents.

Peter O'Toole, Head of the Counselling, Wellbeing and Emotional Support Service for Vision Ireland, said: "Through my work in the past with organisations such as ICBN and Rainbows for all Children, I've

long been aware of numerous invaluable resources being available to guide children and their parents/carers through such difficult times. Given Vision Ireland's mission to provide support to all those who are blind or vision impaired, we felt this was a significant opportunity to diversify on the avenues of assistance we could signpost to."

Lina Kouzi, Head of the Vision Ireland Library Access Service, added: "Our collaboration to produce a suite of accessible publications in Braille and audio has enabled the Vision Ireland Library Access Service to provide a vital resource of accessible reading material for children of all ages experiencing a bereavement. This accessible collection will enable children with a print disability experiencing bereavement overcome print barriers that impede their reading independence."

Anyone who wishes to avail of the accessible Braille and audio versions of both resources can do so through Library@vi.ie.

Help Santa fill up his mailbag with accessible letters

Christmas is fast approaching and we're hoping that this year the festive period will be filled with cheer and happiness for all.

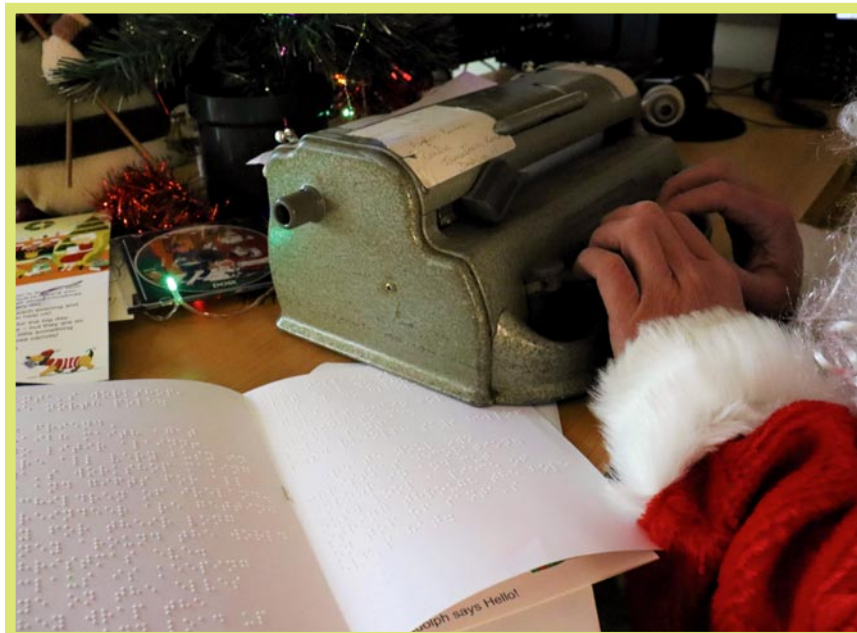
The magic of the holiday season for children is never lost on us and this year Santa is making another huge effort for Vision Ireland and the children we support.

While the big man in the red and white suit will be busy alongside his elves, he is once again committed to making his letters to children who are blind or vision impaired as accessible as possible.

Every year, Vision Ireland Library works with Santa and An Post to produce accessible Santa response cards for the children. This wonderful initiative gives all children who are blind or vision impaired the chance to interact with Santa in whichever format is most accessible for them.

Santa has become so advanced on accessibility that he is able to respond in Braille, audio CD, audio email, and large print. The initial card is produced at Santa's special workshop at An Post. Vision Ireland Library then works with Santa to make sure that his responses are accessible.

If your child would like an accessible Santa card, you can email a letter to:



Santa@vi.ie. If you would prefer to send a physical letter, please send it to Santa, C/O Vision Ireland Library, Unit 29 Finglas Business Centre, Jamestown Road, Finglas, Dublin 11.

There are additional Santa Post Boxes located in Vision Ireland head office on Whitworth Road in Dublin and in Vision Ireland offices around the country.

To make sure that Santa and his elves get it right during the busy festive season, please let Santa know if you would like an audio, Braille or large print response and please provide your address.

Please also keep in mind that Santa gets lots of post this time of year, so he needs to have your letters in by the 15th of December!

Nataliia and Artem's journey to employment and empowerment

In April 2023, Employment, Training & Academia (ETA) Team at Vision Ireland launched the Ukrainian Project, an initiative aimed at facilitating the integration of Ukrainian job seekers into Irish society.

Nataliia and Artem, two remarkable individuals with backgrounds in sports and physical therapy, embarked on a transformative journey with Mariia Horina, dedicated Ukrainian Project coordinator, overcoming language barriers and adapting to a new cultural landscape.

Breaking Language Barriers: A Vital First Step

Arriving in Ireland during the aftermath of the war in Ukraine, Nataliia and Artem faced the initial hurdles of language differences and unfamiliarity with the Irish support system for people who are blind or visually impaired. Despite these challenges, their determination to contribute to Irish society fuelled their motivation.

Recognising the language barrier as a significant obstacle, Vision Ireland responded by organising specialised English courses. Nataliia and Artem immersed themselves in both in-person and online classes, honing their speaking skills and gaining confidence for future interactions, especially in the job market.

Education as Empowerment: From English Classes to Professional Development

While Artem considered venturing into entrepreneurship, he wisely opted to



Artem and Nataliia in Amsterdam.

enhance his professional skills first. Vision Ireland provided valuable insights, connecting him with resources like the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance and Local Enterprise Offices, setting him on a path towards informed decision-making.

Artem's pursuit of volunteering opportunities led him to the Tallaght Rehabilitation Centre. Despite not securing the position, the experience equipped him with a polished CV aligned with Irish job market standards. This experience also showcased the importance of persistence in achieving goals, as the opportunity usually presents itself only after multiple attempts.

Recognising the need for professional qualifications, Nataliia and Artem consulted with the ETA Team, and they eventually enrolled in QQI5 and QQI6 courses in Massage and Physical Therapy. Vision Ireland's intervention ensured accommodations for their interviews, leading to successful enrolment in the

Artem giving some physio to a client.



course, with the support of personal assistants.

Beyond the Classroom: Community Engagement and Pre-Employment Training

Parallel to their studies, Nataliia and Artem embraced community engagement. Nataliia, with her background in pilates, volunteered for the Ukrainian community in Dublin and collaborated with the Irish Red Cross. Artem, on the other hand, delved into the online pre-employment training programme course, a testament to his commitment to meaningful employment. His involvement in the course trial not only demonstrates his dedication but contributes valuable insights to enhance the program for future participants. However, the path to self-realisation is not without challenges. Artem, reliant on his smartphone for learning, encountered some technical obstacles when doing the online course, as the learning platform is not aligned with the VoiceOver software on his phone. His proactive request to receive assistive technologies to help resolve these

issues underscores the importance of accessible learning environments.

Harnessing Skills for the Future: English Fluency, CVs, and Job-Seeking Techniques

Improved English proficiency has enabled Nataliia and Artem to navigate interviews and communicate effectively in their adopted community. Armed with suitable CVs and an understanding of the Irish job market, their journey towards employment gains momentum. The knowledge acquired is not just academic; it's a roadmap for navigating social support and planning their futures.

Looking Ahead: A Clearer Path to Integration

Nataliia and Artem's journey exemplifies resilience and determination. Despite the complexities, their goal of full integration into Irish society and professional self-realisation draws closer. Engaged in full-time education, they are not merely students but ambassadors of empowerment, actively shaping their destinies.

As they navigate challenges, from technical issues to planning for post-college pursuits, Nataliia and Artem remain committed. Their partnership with Vision Ireland is not just a stepping stone; it's a continuous source of support, ensuring their aspirations translate into meaningful careers.

In unlocking their potential, Nataliia and Artem illuminate a path for others, showcasing that with determination, tailored support, and a positive mindset, barriers can be overcome, and dreams can be realised. Their story is not just about integration; it's about empowerment and the limitless possibilities that follow.

Vision Sports Ireland Round-up

Ireland record second place finish at VI Rugby World Cup

The Old Wesley VI Rugby Squad participated in the inaugural Vision Impaired Rugby World Cup in Toulon, France in October.

The team stood out by being the only mixed team in the tournament, with equal male to female representation. The team also boasted two of our own staff with Sara McFadden from Vision Sports Ireland and Hilary Devlin from Vision Ireland both proudly wearing the Irish jersey for the tournament. You can read more about the tournament at <https://visionsports.ie/second-place-finish-for-old-wesley-vi-rugby-squad/>

Comradery Shines Through at Vision Sports' Fittest Families 2023

On Sunday, 22nd October, families from all over the country gathered at Alive Outside, Killruddery, Co. Wicklow for Vision Sports' Fittest Families 2023.

Throughout the day, families took part in a series of challenges designed to push their limits and strengthen their bonds through multiple challenge zones including the barrel zone, tyre zone, forest zone, and eliminator zone. Find out more and view pictures from the event at <https://visionsports.ie/fittest-families-23/>
Vision Sports Education Bursary

In September, supported by Mason Hayes & Curran, Vision Sports Ireland launched a new education bursary for students with a vision impairment entering third level or further education and training, who wish to study in the area of sport and physical activity. The bursary is part of Vision



The Old Wesley VI Rugby Squad participated in the inaugural Vision Impaired Rugby World Cup in Toulon, France in October.

Sports Ireland's ongoing commitment to promoting sport and physical activity for people who are blind and vision impaired in Ireland. The organisation recognises the challenges that people with vision impairments face in accessing third level education within the sport and physical activity faculty, including the financial burden of pursuing higher education. You can find more details at <https://visionsports.ie/oliver-gunning-receives-inaugural-vision-sports-ireland-education-bursary/> on the Vision Sports Ireland website.

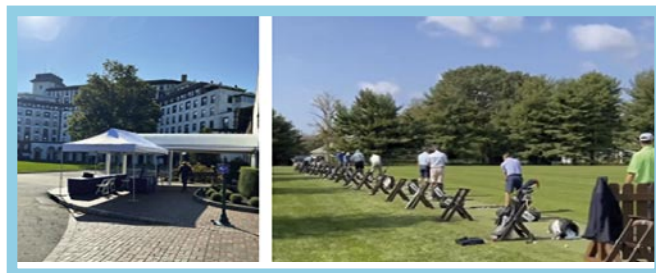


At the Launch of the Mason Hayes & Curran, and VSI Educational Bursary.

Vision Ireland Foundation has been busy!

US Golf Fundraiser

This event was run in conjunction with the US based charity Prevent Blindness. This event was attended by US donors who want to support those living with sight loss in Ireland. Thank you to all who attended on the day.



Ronnie Whelan Golf Classic

The Ronnie Whelan Golf Classic in aid of Vision Ireland took place at Kileen Castle Golf Club on World Sight Day, the 12th of October, 2023. The event kicked off with a shotgun start at 12pm on the day and was followed by a dinner event on the grounds of the castle. All had a wonderful day and enjoyed Kileen Castle while celebrating World Sight Day 2023.



Holmpatrick Cup

Castlegregory Golf Club were winners of the Holmpatrick Cup 2023. James O'Connell and Thomas Galvin lifted the Cup with 51 points and headed off to St Andrew's on a memorable trip as part of their big prize. Thank you to everyone who participated, especially Mullingar Golf Club and captain Stephen O'Hara and his team, for hosting a fantastic final.



LEFT: James O'Connell and Thomas Galvin of the Castlegregory Golf Club who played at St. Andrew's.

Granard Cup

Warrenpoint Golf Club were winners of the Granard Cup 2023. Mary Bell and Catherine Monaghan lifted the Cup with 45 points and they also jetted off to St Andrew's! Thank you to everyone who participated, especially Mullingar Golf Club and ladies' captain Rosemary Whelehan and her team, for hosting.



A Change in Sight

On Monday, 6th November 2023, at 58 South William Street, Dublin 2, which was the organisation's first official office in the 1930s, NCBI, the national sight loss agency, changed its name to Vision Ireland.

Service users, volunteers, Vision Ireland staff and external partners were invited to attend the event which was a celebration of the work that NCBI had done in the past and a look at what Vision Ireland hopes to achieve in the future. We had a number of speakers at the event including Chris White, Vision Ireland CEO, Paul Kelly, Chair of Vision Ireland and Neasa Hourigan, TD. Taoiseach Leo Varadkar also provided a special video message to mark the change to Vision Ireland.

To recognise the range of people Vision Ireland supports, teenager Edith Toomey and 92-year-old Lar Keogh, who was born in the same year NCBI launched, were invited as special guests alongside a number of other service users who were involved in the Vision Ireland creative campaign.

Mr Keogh, said: "I've had vision issues for quite a few years, but I didn't realise I could avail of the services of NCBI. It's been a revelation for me since I became a service user and I have been welcomed with open arms by everyone at Vision Ireland. Their support has been fantastic, and it's really made a big difference in my daily life."

The launch provided an opportunity to reflect on the true size of the community of people who are blind or vision impaired in Ireland. According to census data, published recently, there are more than 296,000 people in Ireland who are blind or



Chris White, CEO, Vision Ireland, speaking at the 'change' announcement.

have a vision impairment. The name change for the 92-year-old national sight loss agency is designed to reach even more of these people.

Speaking at the event, **Chris White, Vision Ireland CEO, said:** "Many people with sight issues are missing the opportunity to avail of our services because they are unaware that we support people with different levels of visual impairment. Our new name, Vision Ireland, is designed to reflect our broad range of support.

"Our mission hasn't changed – we will continue as before – and continue to promote good eye health, and continue to champion an inclusive society where physical and digital spaces are more accessible for all, regardless of abilities." Speaking at the launch, **Paul Kelly, Chair of Vision Ireland, added:** "As someone with a vision impairment that did not access the great services of the NCBI as my family, my doctors and myself all thought it was not for me as I was not fully blind, I am particularly proud to be associated with the great staff and volunteers of Vision Ireland today as we

embark on the next phase of the journey to empower even more blind and visually impaired people in Ireland.”

Messages of support for Vision Ireland poured in from all over the world from RNIB (Royal National Institute for the Blind) in the UK, Vision Australia, European Blind Union and the World Blind Union among others.

Commenting on the launch of Vision Ireland, **Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar**, outlined how the Government is committed to providing services for people with disabilities so that they can lead independent lives, while acknowledging there is much work to be done.

“With new thinking, new perspectives and pooling ideas, we will do better. And I’m glad that we can call on Vision Ireland’s expertise in developing a barrier free and inclusive society. With the goal of enabling people to live an independent life of their choice, Vision Ireland is making a real difference to the lives of people every day. The dedication of Vision Ireland staff and volunteers is truly commendable,” Mr Varadkar said.

Other special guests including **Robbie Henshaw, Member of the Board of Trustees of Vision Ireland** and **Neasa Hourigan, TD**, also attended the event to show their support for Vision Ireland.

Mr Henshaw said: “I’ve been involved with NCBI for a number of years, and it has been both an honour and a privilege to witness the tremendous impact that it has on people who are blind or have a vision impairment. Their dedication to improving the lives of all those they support is truly remarkable, and I am proud to be a part of the next chapter for Vision Ireland.”



Claire Shorten smiles in front of the new Vision Ireland creative in which she features.



L-R: Chris White CEO, Vision Ireland, Edith Toomey and Neasa Hourigan, TD.



L-R: Chris White, CEO, Vision Ireland with Edith Toomey and Lar Keogh, service users.

Deputy Hourigan added: “Being the parent of a child who has a vision impairment, I have first-hand experience of the challenges and uncertainties that can arise. At every stage, NCBI has been a tremendous help, offering invaluable support and resources that have made a significant difference in our lives. I would encourage every parent and guardian to avail of Vision Ireland’s support and services.”

Vision Walk

We had an incredible six days on the first-ever Vision Walk with 40 people attending this year!

The trip was successful, with all feedback positive. The group all got on extremely well, enjoying the walk and downtime together which included some sing songs at the hotel and in restaurants around Marbella. Thank you to all who joined us! Plans are already underway for 2024, so stay tuned.

London Dinner

This year's London Dinner fundraiser hosted by Vision Ireland ambassador Victoria Smurfit was a roaring success. All in attendance on the night enjoyed dinner by the wonderful Richard Corrigan, singing by Josh Keating, an auction, and a raffle. A huge thank you to all who made this event so special.

New Look

To celebrate World Sight Day 12th October, corporate partner New Look took part in a fundraising drive throughout their 29 stores in Ireland for the week. They focused on collection boxes and asked customers to add a donation with the purchase.

On 13th October Vision Ireland Foundation met with all New Look regional managers at their bi-annual meeting. We hosted a fundraising workshop with the managers to help generate ideas and momentum. This resulted in the New Look pledging to take part in an abseil in Croke Park in 2024, as well as holding a second fundraising drive in stores throughout the country to coincide with Black Friday. This partnership is going from strength to strength and will only grow in 2024.



Vision Walk team.

Jimmy Scott and Brian Frawley after receiving their medals at the finish line of the vision walk 2023



Victoria Smurfit, speaking at the London fundraising dinner.



Mrs. Brown's Boys star Fiona O'Carroll, who helped New Look Liffey Valley at their collection day.

**BELOW:
Kilkenny fundraisers.**



Kilkenny Fundraising

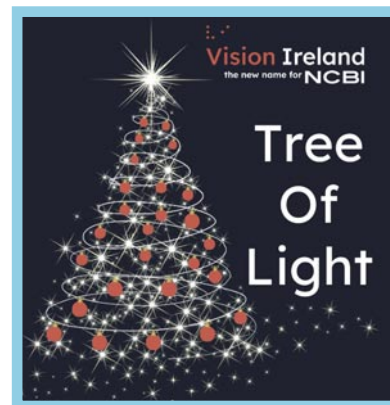
A huge thank you to the TY students at Kilkenny CBS and NCBI Kilkenny, who raised over 600 euro during an on-street collection in Kilkenny city in October.

Tree of Light 2023

An inspirational symbol of hope, the Tree of Light is a unique opportunity to do something genuinely remarkable each and every Christmas, giving the gift of independence, belief and freedom to thousands of people who are blind or vision impaired in Ireland. How does it work? During the month of December, companies and individuals are invited to help Vision Ireland by donating to keep our tree bright for Christmas. These donations support vital services such as assistive technology, educational support, independent living skills and peer support for thousands of people living with sight loss.

Peter Ryan

An incredible achievement from Peter Ryan as he completed 586km from Malin in Co Donegal to Mizen in Co Cork! He covered the equivalent of 15 marathons with true grit, determination, and the support of his incredible team, including the Vision Van (donated by Harris Transport) and Vision Ireland staff. Coverage in the media of Peter's run helped him reach the €100,000 mark he had set himself. Champion Insurance were the title sponsor of this campaign, which paved the way for their pledge to sponsor the work of the Vision Van over the next three years. Peter along with Vision Ireland board member, ambassador and Irish international rugby player Robbie Henshaw, were guests on The Late Late show on Friday the 10th of November, where they talked about NCBI rebranding to Vision Ireland and Peter's incredible achievement, we are extremely grateful to Peter for his work with Vision Ireland.



L-R: Robbie Henshaw, Patrick Keilty and Peter Ryan on the Late Late Show.

Duck Derby 2023

In August, the local community in Dromone Co. Meath held its annual fundraising event called Duck Derby. This year, NCBI/Vision Ireland was one of the beneficiaries of the funds raised. Organiser Karen said, "We had a fantastic day at the Duck Derby; we were blessed with the weather and overwhelmed with the support from everyone who joined the day". The day raised €10,000, which was shared between Vision Ireland and Meath River Rescue.



Cheque presentation at Vision Ireland, Navan.



Ballinasloe, Limerick, Mullingar openings

In recent weeks, the Vision Ireland Retail team has been busy with a number of new shop openings around Ireland. They took on the task of opening two brand-new stores in Ballinasloe and in Limerick, both of which launched on November 6th, followed by the launch of a store in Mullingar which was relocated to a new, modernised premises on November 15th.

The Ballinasloe store, which is located on St Micheals Square, Townparks, celebrated its official opening with dozens of supporters who turned out for the store opening on the day. Local acoustic singer Ciara Lawless serenaded our supporters with a medley of incredible songs and the feedback about her performance was hugely positive. Special guests on the day also included local service users and Senator Aisling Dolan.

The Limerick store, which is located on 28 Cruises Street, Limerick, V94AH33, celebrated surrounded by a brilliant balloon display and they were once again joined by a dedicated following from the local community. This new Vision Ireland store will boast the most modern look of any store in the charity or mainstream retail industries in Ireland. The store is packed with incredible pre-loved pieces and is also home to one of our best, and most colourful, Vintage sections.

The Mullingar store, which is now located on Dominick Street, celebrated the opening and the move from Mary Street with a sustainable display before we cut the



Staff, volunteers and customers at the Ballinasloe opening.



Staff and volunteers at the Mullingar opening.

ribbon to officially open our doors and welcome our incredibly supportive new neighbours in the town. Mullingar has a wide range of different stock to offer, including some high-quality furniture pieces.

Drop in to any of our stores and see what we have to offer. We also gratefully accept donations and expressions of interest in volunteering.

Vision Ireland unveils ambitious nationwide rebranding for its 124 stores



Vision Ireland is in the process of rebranding its 124 stores across Ireland as it seeks to increase its ability to support services for people who are blind or vision impaired.

As part of that relaunch, all retail stores across the country will be rebranded and refitted with the new Vision Ireland identity and logo.

The new Vision Ireland stores will boast the most modern look of any stores in the charity or mainstream retail industries in Ireland. Each store is packed with incredible pre-loved pieces that are available for anyone who drops in. Vision Ireland Retail's small army of over 1,000 volunteers, will play a huge role in this changeover and in helping the organisation to educate the public on our new name and the reasons for the change.

The name change to Vision Ireland was borne out of a necessity for Vision Ireland

to help members of the public and medical professionals to understand that the organisation provides services and supports for people who live with all types of vision impairment.

We will continue to support our service users who are blind or vision impaired in the same ways we always have, but the Vision Ireland name is more inclusive. Some of our shops have already started down the road of changing to Vision Ireland. Over the coming weeks NCBI signs on shop fronts will be taken down and replaced with our new Vision Ireland identity, which we expect to be completed by September 2024.

Not only is Vision Ireland Retail a huge component of the organisation's fundraising efforts to support our services, the shops are also a driver for environmental change and they help make sure that over 1,800 tonnes of pre-loved items don't end up in landfills every year.

ForSight aids Belfast Depaul

Winter is approaching and so is Christmas and for many people across Ireland it can be a difficult period for a variety of reasons.

In a bid to help people who may experience difficulty in the coming months, ForSight, which is Vision Ireland's sister charity shop chain in Northern Ireland, has been collaborating with the homelessness charity Depaul. Depaul is a leading charity operating across the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland supporting some of the most marginalised individuals, couples and families experiencing homelessness. They provide support across five key areas of homelessness including:

- Prevention
- Families & Young People
- High Support Accommodation
- Health & Rehabilitation
- Housing.

As part of the collaboration with Depaul, ForSight set up a Pop-up shop in the Depaul Family Service Centre in Belfast on Wednesday 15th November.

The ForSight team took time and care to create an experience for those who are using the centre through which they could shop ladies', men's and children's clothing at no cost. The items of clothing were donated by the Northern Irish public to the ForSight charity chain and were procured through our warehouse teams.

With Christmas approaching, ForSight was also able to create a toy shop experience for the children at the service centre. The toys available on the day had been donated from local Belfast residents and



ForSight and DePaul staff.

they played a huge role in brightening up the faces of the children and families at the centre.

The event was a great success and ForSight will be working with the Depaul again in the near future. Vision Ireland previously worked with Depaul on a similar project at one of their facilities in Dublin.

Amazon AI Conference

Launched in May 2022, the myVI SmartHub is a voice assistant AI-based skill that's available on all Alexa-enabled devices.

It allows service users and their families access to the latest information about sight loss, audiobooks, podcasts, newspapers, magazines, and much more through simple voice commands on a user's smart speaker. It also allows users to request a referral or a call back from a Vision Ireland staff member.

At the AWS AI and Data Conference held earlier this year in Kilkenny, Amazon's Chief Technology Officer and Vice President, Dr.

Werner Vogels, gave a keynote address focused on harnessing AI to address some of the world's most pressing challenges. During his address, he highlighted the pioneering work of the Vision Ireland and Labs team in developing the myVI SmartHub, acknowledging them as global innovators dedicated to advancing digital accessibility for people around the world.

To launch the SmartHub on your Alexa smart speakers, simply say "Alexa launch myVI". You can link the skill to your myVI account to benefit from the full range of features available. **For more information call us on 1800 911 110 or email smarthub@vi.ie.**

Vision Academy Launched

What is Vision Academy?

Vision Academy is a comprehensive online learning service designed to cater to the specific needs and interests of the sight loss community. The service is built on Blackboard, a popular and user-friendly Learning Management System (LMS), which makes it straightforward to navigate and use for students with vision impairments. From technology and advocacy to accessible sports, our courses are tailored to address the unique needs and challenges faced by the sight loss community.

Our team of expert instructors ensures that all of our courses are accessible, and delivered in a way that suits different learning styles.



Accessing Vision Academy

To access Vision Academy, you can visit the Vision Ireland or Vision Sports website. Log in to your myVI or myVSI account and select the Vision Academy Training tile.

Reach out to training@vi.ie or contact the VI Labs team at **1800 911 110**.

Google Lookout is getting some new features

by Daniel Dunne



Google Lookout, an Android app designed to help blind people and those with low vision is getting some new features. Launched in 2019, the app helps them accomplish everyday tasks like putting away groceries or sorting their mail.

Google updated its popular Lookout App in September and has added some great new features. For iPhone users reading this — Google Lookout is quite similar to Seeing AI and some of the in-camera features that Apple has added to their Camera App.

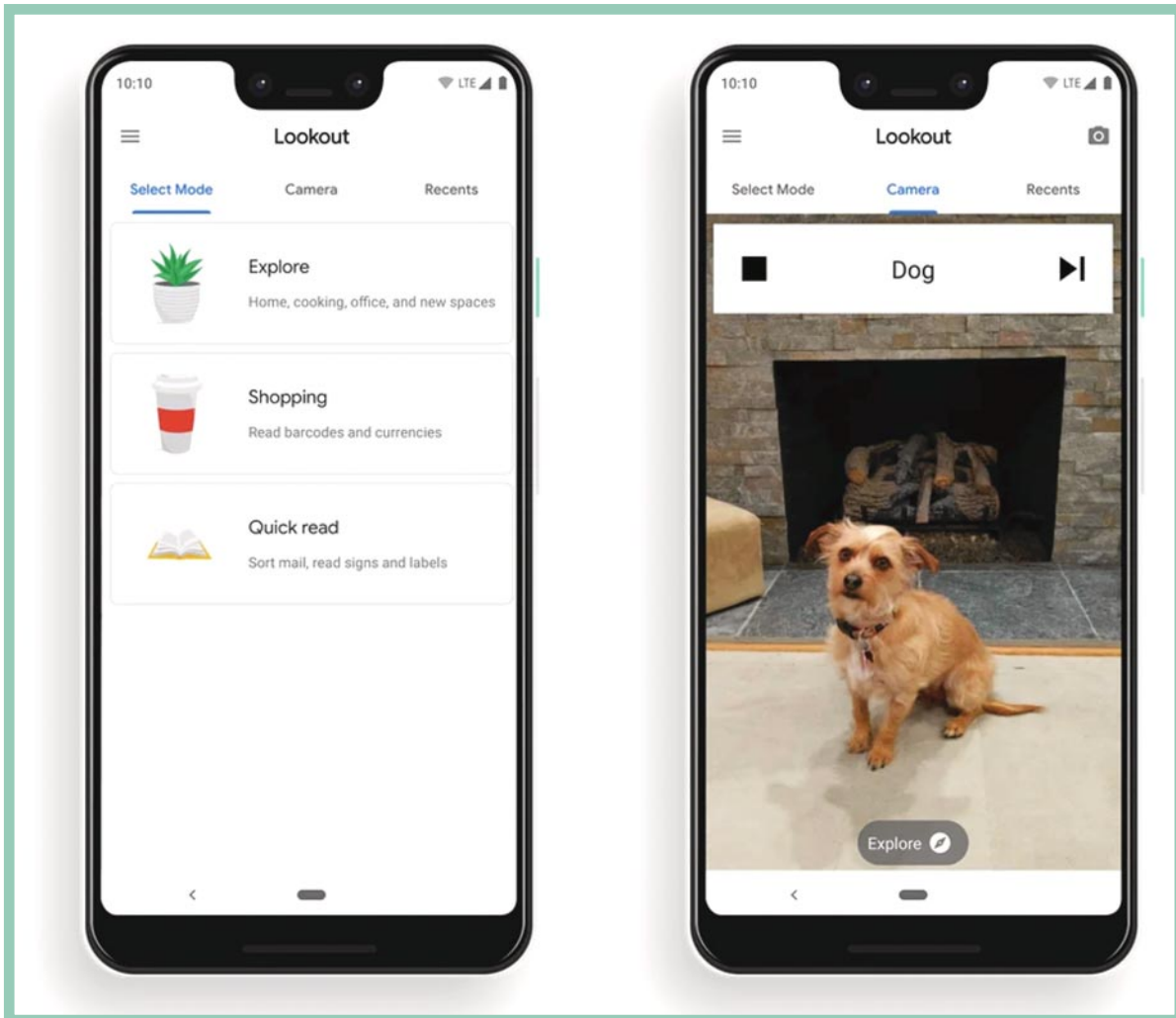
Document Mode Makeover

First up to get a makeover in the Lookout App is the Document mode. Google has added quite a good suite of options for reviewing the on-screen results. After you capture a document, you now have the option to pause the instant read-aloud that kicks in as the playback controls now sit prominently on the bottom of the screen. To the left of the control bar is the speech rate, you now have to skip back and skip forward buttons on either side of the central play/pause control button and in the bottom right you have a cog-on-a-page icon that allows you to completely customise the on-screen text!

Bravo Google, this is an excellent decision and one that has been requested by yours truly, the author, for quite some time now. The only slight complaint I would have is that the skip back and skip forward buttons are pretty much the same size and shape as your Samsung phone's back button – it's too easy to reverse out of the App completely when you mean to skip to another section of text. Also, the control bar at the bottom of the screen has enough real estate to make the control icons bigger! A simple tweak in a future update no doubt would address this.

Addition of 'Recents' Feature

Another sweet addition is the 'recent' option. Google Lookout will keep a record of recent activity, such as recently captured documents, etc. here should you need them again. This is particularly handy if you're out and about and snap say a poster in the shop window and you want to review it later. Google Lookout will now store that information for you as long as you don't completely shut down the App. You can return to the home screen and use your phone for other things, however, if you close all apps running in the background, Google Lookout will remove recent captures — so just be a little aware of that.



AI-Powered Image Analysis

Finally – the images channel in the App now uses AI to analyse photos (regardless if the images have Alt Text or Captions) and describe in good detail what is in the photos. You can select the images from the Gallery on your phone – or if you get say a WhatsApp image, you can ‘share’ that image to Lookout and it will analyse it fairly quickly. Having tried both methods, it is fairly easy and quick to do and the results are decent. Give it a try.

Overall Impressions

Overall, the update to the App has been overwhelmingly good and I think many

users will welcome the improvements and changes. One other major change is the channel buttons have been removed and placed in a menu – this is in the top left corner of the App and does require an extra screen tap to switch channels, however, it’s worth the trade-off to have the audio controls on the bottom in it’s place.

How to Update / Install

Be sure to get the latest Google Lookout update – simply visit Play Store, search for Google Lookout, and tap on the ‘Update’ button, or if you don’t already have the App, tap on Install.

Be My AI – Rolling out now!

By Joe Lonergan

On September 25, 2023, Be My Eyes announced the release of Be My AI to all its existing iPhone users in an open beta stage. The full roll-out will take several weeks, so keep your app updated so you can access the Be My AI feature as soon as it is available.

On average a Be My AI user in beta testing used the feature 5/6 times a day. Over 19,000 users who are blind helped evaluate the product in beta over the last seven months.

Be my AI coming to Android.

There is also good news for Android users of Be My Eyes. 'Be My AI' has started its closed beta testing on Android devices and is expected to get a full broad open beta testing release before the end of the year. So, if you have not heard of Be My Eyes or the Be My AI feature already, Be My Eyes is an app on iOS and Android that helps connect blind and vision-impaired people with sighted volunteers to get help via a video call to help with all sorts of things like selecting colours and distinguishing food items, reading text and anything else you can think of.

Be My Eyes has also connected with many big tech companies such as Microsoft, Google, LinkedIn, and Sky to mention a few, so it is like our own dedicated hotline for people who are blind to these tech giants.

The story behind the Be My AI feature

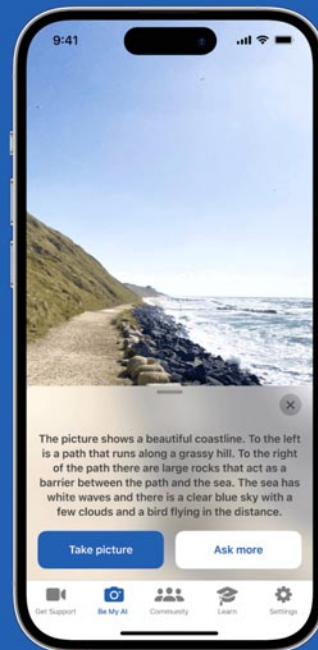
Approximately seven months ago Be My Eyes started working on a feature called Be My AI, a Chat GPT4-powered AI assistant that can provide descriptions for images. The testing on this came back with some great results and descriptions so it was open to beta testing to some users of the Be My Eyes app.

This went well so it was opened to many more users in July and August and then the feature started to gather interest as more people started to explore it and talk about it online. Hans Jorgen Weberg, the founder of Be My Eyes, recently spoke about image and privacy issues related to the feature's use in Illinois, which he said was rectified by blocking the feature in Illinois. He said this was not the perfect solution, but it allows users from all over the world access to Be My AI while they try and negotiate with politicians in Illinois to get the privacy laws changed in the future. You can listen to the full interview with Hans on the **Talking Technology podcast**.

The Be My AI feature has been a very liberating feature for some users as they have never gotten descriptions like this before. I hope I am not insulting anybody by saying the reports that Be My AI can give are better and more detailed descriptions than most humans would give. To access Be My AI, open the Be My Eyes app and tap on the Be My AI tab at the

Be My AI

Rolling out now



bottom of the screen, a take picture button will appear, point it at an object, Be My AI will send it to the Open AI chatbot and a few seconds later you will hear a detailed description of the photo. The other great thing is because it is a chatbot you can follow up with more questions or even more photos and get extra information on the subject of the described photo, and then if you like what Be My AI described, you can send its response and photo to others, or use its description in social media.

What kind of things are people using it for?

- Some of the most common use cases include tapping on a photo in your photo stream and then tapping on share and describe with Be My Eyes. This gives you detailed descriptions of those memories in your photos app.
- Describing photos in a WhatsApp conversation and getting descriptions and staying involved in the conversation.

- It's good for reading menus and asking follow-up questions like what chicken dishes are available.

- Take a picture of your fridge's contents and follow up with a question asking for a recipe from those ingredients.
- Get descriptions from magazines and newspapers that do not have alt text.
- Get descriptions of artworks or paintings.

- Be My AI also will give deaf-blind users a new way to get information if they use a braille display to access text on their smartphone.

So, there you have it! We are closer to a full release of Be My AI. We would love to hear what interesting situations you are using it for.



Vision Ireland

the new name for **NCBI**

**A Change
In Sight**

