

NCBI News

Volume 14 No. 1. Spring 2011

Incorporating *The Blind Citizen* (1923)

Féach — Kids Ski the Limit!



Our young group of vision impaired skiers on the Féach NCBI sponsored ski trip to St. Johann, Austria. See pages 8-9 for the parents' and kid's stories.

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Clearing the snow at head office during the Winter of our discontent.



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SIGHTLINES

Lessons of the Past: History Teaches

This issue of NCBI News appears as we enter the 80th anniversary year of our foundation on the 10th of March, 1931. This issue also appears as the posters for a general election look down on a nation in the grip of the worst down-turn in the Irish economy since the founding of the state.

Four more years of austerity (and possibly many more) lie before us as the country measures up to the repayment of our national debt by means of increases in taxation and swingeing cuts in the provision of public services. December saw us fall victim to the harshest budget in one of several such budgets yet to come.

Even the blind were singled out for a second reduction in their Blind Persons Pension in as many years. A petty decision taken by the Minister for Social Protection Éamon Ó Cuív means that once again the most vulnerable in society have been unfairly

targeted. The inclusion of the 1,444 recipients of the Blind Persons Pension in the general round of welfare payment cuts was campaigned against by NCBI but to no avail.

Opposition parties decried the disgrace of what had been done to welfare recipients, and the “blind” were pointed to as unfairly treated.

History has a way of repeating itself. The general election will take place on February 25th 2011, almost exactly 87 years to the day — February 22 - 29th 1924 when Dáil Éireann debated and shamefully enacted into law the Old Age Pensions Act which amended the Old Age Pensions Acts of 1908 and 1919 and the Blind Persons Act of 1920.

Effectively, this Act reduced all pensions by one shilling a week for all pensioners under 80 years of age. For this, Ernest Blyth, as Minister

for Finance in the Fine Gael Government rightly earned the odium of posterity — that odium was also earned by the 45 TDs who voted for a measure which was a shameful act in the history of Irish society and one that retarded the state’s duty of care to the welfare of its older and blind citizens.

It heralded the standard of treatment of blind and other special consideration groups for the next 50 years. Much of the time and efforts of the NCBI from its founding in 1931 was taken up with this issue, and the non-payment or reduction in allowances to qualifying people under the 1920 Blind Persons Act and the Old Age Pensions Act of 1924 caused untold hardship to the older blind population of Ireland.

It will be interesting to watch in the flutter down of the election posters to see if the tears of lamentation shed for the blind at budget time are wiped away in the speedy undoing by a new government of something they lambasted the previous government for, when framing the 2011 budget.

The blind are “watching” and waiting for the restoration of their meagre income in the form of the blind persons pension and blind welfare allowance — which was also cut by a similar 4%.

Memories are long; history repeats and teaches. The elect who will be happiest in the flutter down of their posters will do well to consider this. Let them consider too the ‘chance’ which ‘happeneth to all’ in the words of *Ecclesiastes 9:11* — ‘I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all’.

Let them be wise in their election, but let them be considerate too. Their duty of care is not to the swift, nor to the strong; but to the weak and the vulnerable, the poor and the marginalised — yes, even to the blind. Yes, and let them remember too the words of Gertrude Stein: ‘*Let me recite what history teaches, history teaches*’. ■

The Altered Images Exhibition



Green Kitchen, 2007 — David Creedon.

The Crawford Art Gallery in Cork is hosting ‘Altered Images’ from Monday 14th February to Friday 29th April; the exhibition is travelling from the Irish Museum of Modern Art as part of the National Programme.

Altered Images is designed to engage a universal audience: both those with visual impairments and those without, audiences with physical impairments, the un-initiated and the regular exhibition-goer, young people and mature audiences, groups and individual visitors. Its multi-sensory approach invites all visitors to touch, listen, hear, imagine, feel, see, navigate and experience.

Each artwork is accompanied by an audio description and a three-dimensional tactile model. An accessible website for the project can be found at www.alteredimages.ie The exhibition is being held at The Crawford Gallery — www.crawfordgallery.ie

Opening hours 10am - 5pm
Monday to Saturday, with late night opening on Thursday to 8pm. ■

NEWS Snippets

Coffee Morning to Support Run 24 at Work and NCBI

On Thursday 16th of December, the Occupational Therapy department of the Mater Hospital, held a coffee morning to raise money for NCBI. A member of the occupational therapy staff who I train with in my gym heard about the Run 24 challenge and offered to run a coffee morning to support the challenge and also to raise awareness about NCBI and our services.

The coffee morning was a wonderful success. The team had gone to a huge effort with the event and had baked all kinds of goodies for their colleagues to enjoy as well as coffee, tea and hot chocolate donated by Starbucks and Café Sol, as the entire staff in the hospital were invited to come along. I spoke to a number of staff about our services, about making referrals and our aids and appliances, so as well as being a great fundraiser it was a chance to meet staff in the Mater hospital to let them know about what we do here at NCBI.

Many thanks to the occupational therapy

department for their hard work and for raising a fantastic sum of €436. — Hilary Casey, Dublin Community Resource Worker. ■

Entitlements for people with disabilities

The Citizens Information Board has published 30,000 copies of the latest edition of Entitlements for people with disabilities. The guide looks at the full range of supports for people with disabilities. It includes comprehensive information on income supports, health, transport, education, employment, housing, taxation, disability policy and the law. This edition includes a new chapter on complaints and appeals. Each benefit is explained in detail including the purpose of the payment, how you qualify, how long the payment lasts, other key points about the payment you may need to know, how you apply and where to go for further information.

Entitlements for people with disabilities is free and is available from your local Citizens Information Centre, from the Citizens Information Board by

emailing info@ciboard.ie or calling **01-6059000**. It is also available in alternative formats, such as Braille, large print or on CD, on request. It is available to download in PDF format at www.citizensinformationboard.ie/news/news20080522.html?year=2008 . ■

Launch of “Shift in Perspective”

The recent launch took place of “Shift in Perspective”, a new publication that will help all those working in professional and community-based venues, galleries, theatres and related arts organisations to address issues of equity and art form development more effectively.

Shift in Perspective is the result of a partnership between the Arts Council (An Chomhairle Ealaíon), Arts & Disability Ireland (ADI), Mayo County Council, the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) and South Tipperary County Council. It grew out of the partner organisations’ work to develop innovative approaches in high-quality contemporary arts and disability practice, and to make arts venues more accessible to artists and

audiences with disabilities. In creating conditions where the arts are more accessible and inclusive, it will not only reach new artists and audiences but also enable the production of work that is more artistically ambitious and innovative. ■

NCBI and Social Media

In the last few months NCBI has produced a number of podcasts and short video clips. These include podcasts on Mobility and Orientation, where one long cane user talks about the difference that the long cane has made to his life, Cooking Independently where you can listen to the cooking experiences of some NCBI service users and Roddy Doyle speaking at our Fun Braille Reading Day in November. We have also produced a shortened version of our corporate video. Check these out online at www.ncbi.ie. ■

Places Still Available for Camp Abilities 2011

Due to the success of Ireland's first ever Camp Abilities last year, another is planned for 2011. Camp Abilities is a residential

developmental sport and recreation camp for children who have vision impairment or blindness. It will take place in Killarney, Co. Kerry from Sunday 24 April until Thursday, 28 April. Children who are vision impaired or blind and aged between 8-18 years from anywhere in Ireland are invited to attend.

Last year, 15 children between the ages of 8 and 14 participated in the camp and had the opportunity to be involved in activities such as fishing, archery, swimming, soccer, base ball, tandem cycling and rowing. Each child is paired with an adult on arrival to camp to provide assistance and offer encouragement throughout the camp.

Niamh Daffy, organiser of Camp Abilities has been in touch to let us know that there are still places available and she is keen to get them filled.

To find out more contact Niamh Daffy, Co-ordinator of CARA National Adapted Physical Activity Centre
Tel: 066 7145646 or log on to www.caraapacentre.ie. ■

EBU launches its new website

The European Blind Union (EBU) is pleased to announce the recent launch of our new website. Accessibility is of course a key issue and we have worked hard to ensure that the website is fully accessible.

Apart from providing a wealth of important information on Europe-wide issues relating to blindness and sight loss, the new site also has fun features such as a kid's corner, and a Braille convertor to help people understand the Braille alphabet. EBU newsletters and press releases are also available on the site.

We are still completing the uploading of all the data onto the new site:

www.euroblind.org so please visit regularly. Your comments on the layout, content and accessibility of the site would be greatly appreciated.

For further information contact Gary May, EBU Information Officer,
Email: ebuinfocom@euroblind.org ■

NEWS Snippets

Disclosure of Disabilities

AHEAD — The Association for Higher Education & Access Disability has put together a book about the disclosure of disabilities. The aim of this is to ensure that students and graduates with disabilities and also employers have a one-stop shop in the form of a short publication, which explains all issues around disclosure of disability. As this is the first version of the publication, all feedback is welcome. To obtain a copy or for further information log on to www.ahead.ie/employment.php or contact Niamh Hayes GET AHEAD Project coordinator on **01 2789516** or email niamh.hayes@ahead.ie . ■

Ireland's Digital Switch Over

At the end of 2012 the current analogue television service, which provides RTÉ 1 & 2, TV3 and TG4 through a standard television aerial, will be switched off.

The new digital service, called **Saorview**, will replace this. Saorview is being launched in April although it is already available in many parts of the country. You can continue using the existing

DeafBlind musicians to perform in Cork

In a unique awareness raising event, two DeafBlind musicians will perform on guitar and piano on Friday, 4th March 2011 in Cork. Russ Palmer, a music therapist and songwriter, will travel from Finland to Cork to perform with Orla O'Sullivan, the world's first DeafBlind music teacher, pianist & performer, in the Cornstore Bar & Restaurant (Cornmarket Street, 7 to 8.30pm).

The duo will also present a Masterclass, entitled "Two Musical Journeys – a DeafBlind Perspective", in the Cork School of Music on Saturday, 5th March (2 - 4pm). Both events are open to the public but the Masterclass may be of particular interest to students of music, disability studies, music therapy or psychology.

Both Russ & Orla have dual sensory losses which prevent them from participating in many of the usual activities that others may take for granted (unless there is a suitable interpreter at hand). They see this as a rare opportunity to raise awareness about



Russ Palmer.

DeafBlindness and to promote the benefits of music in dealing with daily challenges in life.

Performance: Friday 4th March (7-8.30pm), Cornstore Bar & Restaurant, Cornmarket Street, Cork.

Masterclass: Saturday 5th March (2-4pm), Cork School of Music, Union Quay, Cork.

For more information:
<http://www.russpalmer.com> and <http://www.orlaosullivan.ie>
or phone: 087-6175334. ■

analogue service until the end of 2012, giving you plenty of time to make the switch.

RTÉ will also be launching its public information campaign on the matter shortly and all information will be available in all accessible formats such as Braille, large print

or audio. There will also be an information broadcast on RTÉ 1 and 2 and in the local press.

You can find more information about **Saorview** and the digital switchover on the internet at the official web site www.saorview.ie . ■

Bon Voyage, Phil

Phil Guaran retires after 33 years of dedicated service



Phil Guaran whose contribution to NCBI has been immense.

Friday the 31st of January marked another milestone in NCBI's history with the retirement of Phil Guaran. Phil has been a valued member of the NCBI staff at our head office for over 30 years and those who worked with her will know her as a hard working and charming individual whose sunny nature could make even the darkest days bright. Thirty three years is such a long time to be involved in any organisation and NCBI would like to note the invaluable contribution that Phil has made to NCBI over the years. She will be greatly missed by all staff in NCBI and we wish her well on her retirement.

Here are some things that Hilary Casey an NCBI Community Resource Worker had to say about Phil.

I have had the absolute pleasure of working with Phil since 2002 when I began working as a community resource worker. Phil is without doubt one of the most professional individuals I have ever worked with. She is a person of high integrity who shows nothing but commitment and loyalty to NCBI and the people she works with in all areas of the organisation both inside and out. Myself and the other community resource workers have shared an office space with Phil over the last number of years. During this time there has never been an occasion on which she could not find a few moments to provide advice or support about a particular issue. We have all found her insight, advice and level head invaluable. Phil taught me many things at work including that we should never forget why we are working at NCBI, that professional behaviour is key, that your colleagues are a central point to your workplace and that the phone directory is still a useful place to find phone numbers!! Oh and I can now print out envelopes instead of writing them by hand, thanks to her direction! Above all, Phil is 'one of the good ones'. She is kind considerate and has a wonderful heart. We will miss her greatly but know she will be visiting us regularly! ■



Des Kenny presenting Phil with flowers.



L-R: Kitty Bunion, Margaret Devaney, Des Kenny, Deirdre Allen, Phil Guaran, Brenda Behan, Fiona Kelty and Margaret Carey.



L-R: Heather Hunter, Phil Guaran, Heather Quinn and Anne Smyth.

Skiing the Limit

Féach takes to the Piste at St. Johann

NCBI sponsored Féach's ski trip to Austria in January. Féach is a support group made up of parents of children who are blind or vision impaired. Five families signed up and here, Eithne Walsh talks about her experience of the trip.

This year we went skiing with Féach to St. Johann in Austria. To describe how great the holiday was I have to start at the end. We flew back into Dublin on the 22nd of January and as the plane landed my six-year-old son (vision impaired) who was sitting beside me took one look out the window and burst out crying. "I want to go back", he sobbed. I think he described accurately how we all felt!

The trip is much more than a skiing holiday. Yes we all go skiing and have a holiday but sometimes the sum is greater than the parts. The skiing holiday idea started in Kiltiernan when the ski club of Ireland invited Féach children to give it a go. Here the voluntary instructors cajoled, encouraged and enticed our children for hours on the dry slopes. Always, always in good humour. It was here that we first heard you can, of course you can!

After our dry slope experience five families signed up for the holiday. That's five families, with twelve children, seven of whom are blind or visually impaired. They ranged in age from 6 to 20. The blind and visually impaired children got one-on-one tuition which was kindly sponsored by NCBI. Through this tuition they learn to ski but they also learn that anything is possible. It is wonderful to see the great relationships blossom between instructor and child, to see the child's confidence grow in so many ways as the instructor becomes a friend,

mentor, role model and someone who constantly tells them, you can! Over the week the group of children became very close. They were always laughing and messing and what struck me in particular was how much they looked out for each other. I think for the children to be surrounded by others who don't see very well, or may even see less than them, was a relief. Just for a week not to be different was a break. Everyday they all met for lunch in different restaurants up the mountain. Sometimes we would be in the same restaurant. Usually they did not want to know us; they were too busy having a good time. The level of independence they gained over the 7 days was good for all of us.

Coming down a mountain on skis can be scary; I can't imagine trying to do it without perfect vision. All of our children did it effortlessly — better than us! It is hard to describe the feeling you get when you spot your child from a ski lift, skiing down the mountain. Sometimes things can be an effort at home, particularly trying to get them through the educational system, finding a sport that they like, and in which they can participate, is difficult — I hear the teenage years are worse. We now have two visually impaired children who can ski. What use is that when there is no snow in Ireland? I hear you say. It has given their confidence a great boost and it's a very large feather in their cap — sometimes feathers can be hard to come by. They can't chase a ball around a football pitch or hockey pitch, but they can ski. God knows what else is out there for them to discover. When I watched them both go through the school gates the following Monday, they looked taller.

We were sad to be home but determined

**Left to right:
Naoise Kelly,
Dean Cusack,
Ailbhe Flynn,
Jordan Kelly,
Charlotte
Anderson, Zack
Kelly, Maya Flynn,
Cormac Flynn,
Emily Anderson.**



to go again next year. The kids are making a special effort to turn off the lights, save their pocket money, eat margarine instead of butter. When my son told me he didn't need new runners despite the holes in his existing ones and that we needed the money for skiing instead, I thought things might have gone too far!

Ski the limit

My name is Dean and I'm vision impaired. I'm twelve years old and I live in Waterford. I would like to tell you about the great week skiing holiday that I went on in St. Johann, Austria.

The holiday was organised by Féach and Topflight and this was the second year I have gone on this trip. Everyday we hit the slopes at 10am until 3pm. We had an hour's lunch break, which was good because you get a big appetite from skiing! There are four different types of slopes to ski on – green, blue, red and black. I got to ski on the red slope and it was hard. The slope was very steep and fast and I had to learn to put on the brakes! My instructor's name was Peter. He was a champion kick boxer from



R-L: Dean Cusack and ski instructor Peter.

Austria. He was pretty cool and I had a great laugh with him. On the second last day, we had our prize giving. I got a medal and a certificate for coming first in the speed race, which was a big improvement on last year, when I came second last!

Overall, it was a brilliant holiday. I had loads of fun and made great friends. St. Johann was a lovely town — even if you didn't ski. I'm hoping to go again next year with Féach, if my mum lets me! ■

Keep on Running!

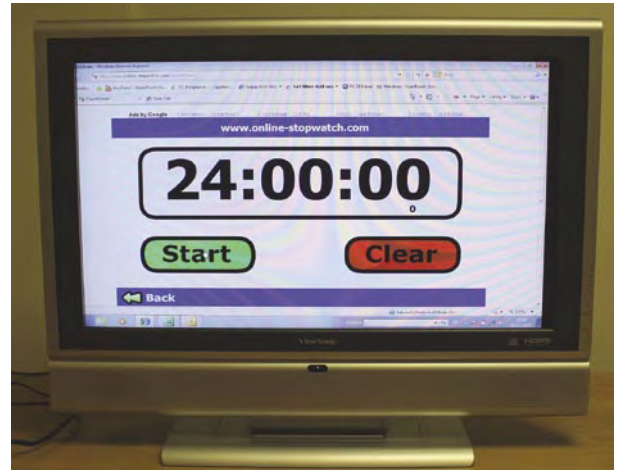
Hilary's Run 24 @ Work– What a Success!

Hilary Casey, a Dublin Community Resource Worker with NCBI decided on a novel way to raise funds for NCBI when in December she carried on her Run 24 @ Work ... Hilary takes up the story...

Keep on running ... that's what I heard a lot during the 24 hours from 4pm Thursday 9th of December until 4pm Friday 10th, as I ran a mile every hour on the hour for NCBI with the help of my colleagues and friends. After nearly 10 weeks of pretty intense training under the watchful and skilful eye of Ian Matthews from Hyperfit, Dublin, it was hard to believe it was all happening, as Des Kenny our CEO hit the count down timer and I started my first mile on that cold and snowy afternoon.

Thanks to the generosity of T&T fitness in Cavan who lent us a treadmill for the event. We combined this with our own gym equipment so we had a total of two treadmills and a bike, which allowed up to two other people run, walk or cycle along with me for each mile of the challenge. And I wasn't short of volunteers! From 4pm to 4am and back to 4pm again, the treadmills were always busy, which helped to keep me awake!

As the evening drew in on the 9th and the miles were clocking up, I was delighted to have the support of Elaine Howley, Aideen Treanor and Sophie Gaine who stayed with me until the sun rose again on Friday morning. I don't think I will ever forget having chicken and potatoes at 12am in my place of work! From 7am the following morning my colleagues came in and out all the following day. We were



The stop watch, a constant throughout Hilary's run.

also delighted to have a visit from the Ray Shah and the Blue Crew from Q102 radio at 12pm who brought goodie bags and muffins which were very welcome, even if my body was getting a bit fed up by this stage!

It was an emotional end when the final mile was completed as many colleagues, trainees, friends and family were present to watch the timer count down its final seconds and for me to cross the virtual finishing line. When I stepped off the treadmill for the final time it was hard to believe it was over and I had actually reached my goal. I was exhausted but very happy indeed.

There is no way I could have done this without support and what can I say when "thank" you just doesn't cut it? I have been totally overwhelmed by the reaction and support of all my colleagues and friends at NCBI. I want you to know just how much your support, be it by sponsorship, walking, running, cycling, cheering, encouraging and kind words has meant to me.

Keep on Running!



Hilary running while talking with Ray Shah from Dublin's Q102 Radio Station.



Hilary Casey is joined by colleague Sophie Gaine.

European Blind Union launches the 2011 Braille Contest

The European Blind Union has launched the European strand of the Fifth Onkyo International Braille Essay Contest. This is a worldwide initiative planned and sponsored by Onkyo and by the Braille Mainichi, two Japanese firms actively engaged in the promotion of braille.

Through personal experience, contestants will tell how braille has empowered them and improved their daily lives. Over the last four years the Onkyo contest has been met with great enthusiasm by European braille users.

The competition is open to all ages and 5 essays will be selected by NCBI and St Joseph's Centre for the Visually Impaired to represent Ireland in the contest. The winners will then go into the hat for final consideration by the EBU. The winners will be announced in September.

Information on the theme of the competition and the submission deadline are not yet available. Please keep an eye on our website for further details of the competition — www.ncbi.ie . ■

From moving of treadmills, setting up of big screens, the overnight team that turned in to the 24 hr team, the people who came in the middle of the night, to the ones who squished in time before work or on a lunch break. To the amazing photographers, to the guys in the training centre whose schedule had to work around me, to the people who fed me, to the ones who just quietly gave me a hug or took my hand, you are all amazing and this reminds me of why I love working here. The great news is that I raised just under €3,000 for NCBI which I am absolutely thrilled about! Thank you, thank you, thank you!

I would like to thank Ian Matthews of Hyperfit, Tony maguire of T & T Fitness, Gar Holohan of Aura Sport and Leisure, Energie Fitness, Clarendon Street, without whose support this event would not have been possible. ■

From the Jaws of the Past

Reading The Gift of Genius

As momentous as the development of Braille, the Kurzweil Reading Machine has revolutionised the lives of blind people across the world ... Frank Callery recall its introduction in 1976.

When next you sit down at your computer and converse with Jaws or Hal or whatever you happen to be using as a screen reader, in the background, floating in the great ether will be a memory of 35 years ago when the first text-to-speech machine came on the market. If you crank your ear to the memory frequency you will hear Walter Cronkite using the Kurzweil Reading Machine to read his signature sign off: 'And that's the way it is, January 13, 1976.'

Momentous Occasion

And this was as momentous an occasion in the history of the blind as Louis Braille's adaptation of Charles Barbier de la Sera's punctiform writing system. The unveiling of the first reading machine capable of translating printed material into spoken words was to open up a new world of endless possibilities, not alone for educational and employment opportunities, but for the basic and crucial communications networks in which we all participate.

Sitting beside Walter Cronkite that night, was Raymond 'Ray' Kurzweil the 26 year old inventor of the reading machine. Ray Kurzweil grew up in the Queens area of New York in a secular Jewish family. His parents had hurriedly emigrated from Austria just before the onset of World War II. His father was a musician and composer and his mother was an artist. His uncle, an engineer at Bell Labs, taught young Ray the basics of computer science. By 1963 he had written his first computer program. As a 2nd year undergraduate at MIT he developed a business which matched up high school students with colleges, using a computer program he had written. This was called the Select College Consulting Program. His

small company paid \$1,000 an hour to rent time on the only computer then in New England with enough memory to fit the database comprising 2 million facts on 3,000 colleges. Kids, delighted with the colleges the program had suggested, sent appreciative letters. But a few parents were furious that the program had failed to recommend Harvard or other Ivy League schools. It was Ray's first experience of the ability of computers to affect peoples' lives. The company was sold to a New York publisher, for \$100,000 plus royalties.

In 1974, Ray started Kurzweil Computer Products, Inc. (KCP), to pursue his interest in pattern recognition. He worked on the unsolved problem of teaching a computer to identify printed or typed characters regardless of type style and printing quality. Existing systems could then only recognize certain special fonts (such as Courier, OCR A). Ray and his colleagues taught the computer how to extract the abstract qualities of letter shapes, defining what essential properties made, for example, all capital A's different from all capital B's. The team created the first "omni-font" (any font) Optical Character Recognition (OCR). The search was on to find an application for this technology.

By chance, while sitting beside a blind man on a plane flight, Ray happened on the idea that the most exciting application of this new technology would be to create a machine that could read printed and typed documents out loud, thereby overcoming the reading handicap of blind and visually impaired individuals. This goal introduced new obstacles in 1974. Flat-bed scanners or speech synthesizers were not available. Ray and his team set about developing the first CCD flat-bed scanner and the first full text-to-speech synthesizer. These three technologies were combined in the first print-to-speech reading machine for the blind. And so it was that on that momentous occasion on January 13, 1976, Ray, along with leaders of the National Federation of the Blind, announced the Kurzweil Reading Machine.



Braille and the Kurzweil Reading Machine, two of the inventions which have bettered the lives of blind and vision impaired people.

One blind person who heard the Walter Cronkite *Today Show* transmission was Stevie Wonder. Stevie became the first customer and this led to a long-term friendship between the inventor and the blind musician. Kurzweil subsequently brought innovations to computer-based music and is today one of the preferred manufacturers of keyboards and studio equipment.

In 1978, Kurzweil Computer Products introduced a commercial version of the Kurzweil OCR, which was used by Lexis and Nexis to build their on-line legal and news information services. In 1980, Ray sold the company to Xerox, who saw the advantages of the scanning and OCR technology. Ray continued as a consultant to this division of Xerox until 1995. Today, 29 years after its inception, the OCR originally developed by Ray Kurzweil and his team — now called Xerox TextBridge — still continues as a market leader. KCP is now ScanSoft, a public, partially-owned subsidiary of Xerox.

Since then Kurzweil has gone on to introduce the Kurzweil Reader, used extensively by blind people in the USA. His close collaboration with the Nation Federation of the Blind had improved the lives of blind and vision impaired people, providing them with the tools to pursue higher education, employment and personal development. Thank you Ray, we celebrate the gift of your genius. ■



Walter Cronkite (left) and Ray Kurzweil on the Today Show in 1976.



Stevie Wonder, the first customer of the Kurzweil Reading Machine.



Ray Kurzweil, author, inventor, visionary, who changed the lives of blind and vision impaired people, by opening up a world of opportunities through his wonderful inventions.

NCBI, the Beginnings

The Founding of NCBI, 1931

In this the 80th Anniversary year of the founding of NCBI, Frank Callery draws on the soon to be published History of NCBI (and of the History of The Blind in Irish Society in general), to outline in a series of articles the founding and early work of NCBI and to profile some of its founding members. The first question is: Why and how was it founded?

The founding of the National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI) on March 10th 1931, or as it was initially known, The National Council for the Welfare of the Blind of Ireland, was a watershed in the annals of Irish social history. Not only was it the first voluntary body dealing with a disability group, founded in the Irish Free State, but it was to go on to set precedents in the provision of welfare and educational advancement for disabled and disadvantaged people in Ireland.

On October 18th 1929 Miss Barbara Knox wrote from Holton Lodge, North Cheriton, Templecombe, Somerset, to the secretary of The National Institute for the Blind, at Great Portland Street, London. She asked: 'I wonder if you have ever thought of re-starting your branch of the National Institute in the Irish Free State. It is a good many years since I remember your office in Westmoreland Street, Dublin. Would you be prepared to re-open your branch if a suitable person be found to undertake the work? There are several, like myself, who feel that much more could be done for the Irish blind than is being done at present; there are such numerous little societies and institutions which need something like the national institute, with its up-to-date methods and wide facilities and numerous departments, to bring them together. I am myself a native of Ireland and should like to see the Irish blind as well cared for as those in England. I should be glad if your committee would give this letter their consideration'.

Barbara was right. There were 13 institutions involved in blind welfare then operating on the

island of Ireland, each doing its own thing, some ineffectually at that. They were: The Richmond National Institution for the Industrious Blind (ostensibly non-denominational, 41 Upper Sackville Street, Dublin (1810); The Blind Asylum, Infirmary Road, Cork ([1811] 1841); The Molyneux Asylum, or National Institution, for Female (Protestant) Blind, Leeson Park, Dublin (1815); Limerick Asylum for Blind Females, (Protestant - 1834); The Ulster Institution, Belfast (1836); The Association for Relief of Indigent Blind and Lending Library, 22 South Frederick Street, Dublin, (1857); St. Joseph's Blind Asylum for Roman Catholic Males, Drumcondra, Dublin (1858); St. Mary's Blind Asylum for Roman Catholic Females, Merrion, Dublin (1858); The Belfast Workshops for the Blind (1871); The Cliftonville Home for the Blind (Mrs. Pim's — 1886); The National League of the Blind of Ireland (1889), The Irish Association for the Blind (1921), The Rochfort Wade Hostel for Blind Women, non-denominational (1921).

Mary Mayne (Molly) Rochfort Wade, the daughter of William Rochfort Wade became the close friend of Barbara Knox. They lived a frugal existence together all their lives, devoting themselves to the welfare of the blind of Ireland. Barbara Knox was 25 when she wrote her letter to the N.I.B. Both she and Molly were anxious to see a revival of the work William Rochfort Wade had undertaken on behalf of the blind in Ireland. With the passage of time and the small intervening fact of Irish Independence, the N.I.B. had, in a sense, forgotten about Ireland. It was perhaps propitious that the recipient of the letter was the then new General-Secretary of the N.I.B., Waldo McGillicuddy Eagar, C.B.E., second son of Rev. Alexander R. McEagar, D.D., T.C.D., latterly Rector of Gowran, Cornwall. McG. Eagar lost no time in responding to Barbara Knox's letter. On October 21st 1929 he told her: 'I am writing immediately to acknowledge your letter of 18th October, which will require very careful thought. Personally, I am sympathetic as like yourself I am Irish by origin. My council will give every

consideration to your suggestion, but whether they will regard such an extension of the work of the Institute as in their power I do not know. I will take the first opportunity of discussing it with the Chairman and Treasurers and will let you know whether there is any tendency in favour of your suggestion. — Yours faithfully, W. McG. Eagar. Within three days McG. Eagar had discussed Barbara's request with Captain Sir Beachcroft-Towse, V.C., Chairman of the N.I.B. Both men agreed that "While there is undoubtedly scope and need for a National Body for the Blind of Ireland to fill gaps and to co-ordinate, it is excessively difficult for the British N.I.B. to propose itself as the right body in the Free State". He suggested that if a fairly representative group of people were to put forward a plan and to ask the N.I.B. for help or advice, it would be a starting point.

On November 5th having met Barbara Knox and Molly Rochfort Wade McG. Eagar wrote a report of the meeting for the N.I.B. record. "Both these ladies are quite young (Molly was 26) and I imagine that Miss Rochfort Wade has more business ability. Miss Knox lives in Kilkenny and Miss Rochfort Wade in London. 'Both are Protestants'. Neither have any real knowledge of what provision is made for the blind in Ireland, nor do they know how to set to work to rouse public opinion. Miss Knox has come across individuals who are blind and neglected and has been stirred emotionally to the need for getting something done. She has been to a blind asylum at Drumcondra, the head of which seems to be a Brother John (Byrne) who seems to have made a great impression on her. There are other blind men, Miss Knox thinks, in Cork. She does not know whether there are any government grants available, any register, etc. The religious difficulty is, of course, persistent in Ireland, but religious feeling is not so strong now. Practically all the blind people in southern Ireland would be Roman Catholic".

The Armitage Connection

McG. Eagar sought to advance the "Irish" cause by writing to Alice Stanley Armitage at her correspondence address at the Ladies National Club, 11 Cromwell Road, London S.W.7. Unknown



Barbara Knox.



Alice Stanley Armitage.



Molly Rochfort Wade.



William Rochfort Wade.

to McG. Eagar, Alice Armitage was 'already working over the field' and had been recently in touch with affairs of the blind in Ireland, as she had previously with those of India and Egypt. She sent on a parcel of notes to McG. Eagar who in turn sent them on to Barbara at Bonnettstown Hall, Kilkenny, with the covering letter: 'It occurred to me the other day that Miss Armitage, the daughter of the famous founder of this Institute, might be able to help you. I attach her reply as it stands'. Alice Armitage had an interview with Barbara Knox at her brother's estate at Noan, Co. Tipperary in January 1930. She 'got the names of some influential people in Dublin likely to be interested in the blind and prepared a statement which she asked McG. Eagar to check and amend and have it printed so that she might distribute it. However, N.I.B. had a secondary purpose in becoming involved with the blind of the Free State. From Alice Armitage's enquiries it became known that the Richmond Institution was threatened with closure and N.I.B. could not countenance that. While working with Alice Armitage and her 'Committee' it also embarked on a rescue mission for the Richmond. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 16**

NCBI, the Beginnings

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

Alice Armitage was keen to expand the work for the blind which had been initiated in a small way in South Tipperary. Keenly aware of the sectarianism which existed and aware also of the anti-British feelings among many people in Ireland, she adopted a policy of softly, softly; a stance which NCBI was to maintain and which was to inform its policies of recruitment and client services for many years. In order to build acceptance, Alice Armitage needed to establish some ground work and link the work intended by the new 'Committee' to what had been acceptable in 1920. She therefore laid claim to the work of the Irish Advisory Committee on the Blind which had emanated from the 1917 Report of The Department Committee on the Welfare of the Blind, following which the Advisory Committees on the Blind for England (and Wales), Scotland, and Ireland were set up. In establishing this "continuum" she was conscious of the opposition which was building among some of the organised blind in Dublin, particularly from J.P. Neary and the Irish Association for the Blind which saw a "Committee" so closely linked to the N.I.B., as a threat to its 'manor'.

McG. Eagar visited Dublin on Saturday January 19th. 1931 for a few days. He had two purposes. One, to meet with the Richmond and set the N.I.B. plan before its committee. The second was to attend at Alice Armitage's request, a 'private' meeting which she had called at the Standard Hotel for 5.15 pm. on Tuesday January 20th 1931. They spent time going over the address Alice had prepared for the meeting and in assessing those who had been invited. Among these was her influential 'Roman Catholic' considered so necessary to the project. Prior to the meeting, McG. Eagar had had interviews with W. J. Gilligan of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and Miss Long of the Civics Institute. Those invited to the meeting were: Dr. Thomas Gilman Moorhead; Mr. Gilligan and Mr Lennan of the St. Vincent de Paul; Mr. Garvey; Mrs. Olivia Hughes, Co. Tipperary and of the United Irishwomen's Association; Miss Angela Boland; Mr. Fullerton; Mrs. Nanette (Nancy) Quin;

Miss Long, Civics Institute; Mr. Denis Barrett, former Assistant Commission of the Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP); Mr. Wrench a blind school master from Wicklow, Miss Emily Eacott; and Mr. W. McG. Eagar. No representatives of the then existing institutions for the blind were invited. Nor were the representatives of the Irish Association for the Blind nor the National League of the Blind. Alice Armitage welcomed those who attended and read letters from Barbara Knox, Molly Rochfort Wade and Dr. James Quin. She suggested that the meeting should be regarded as 'private'. She then delivered her prepared script which had been carefully compiled following consultations with Dr. James Quin, Denis Barrett. Mr. McG. Eagar and others and which announced the general principals on which she thought help might be given to the blind of Ireland.

My Father's Work

'I expect most of those present know that it is through my father having spent so much of his life in helping blind people that I came to be interested in that work. I have always spent part of the year in Ireland but it was only about two years ago that I realised that since Mr. Rochfort Wade's death in 1920 and the passing of the Blind Persons' Act that all voluntary work for the blind, outside of the Institutions, had practically ceased in the Free State. The Government give financial assistance to the very poor. A blind person can receive the Old Age Pension at 50 years of age at the rate of 10/- per week, provided their income does not exceed £15: 12s. 6d. per annum. Those under 50 receive allowances at varying rates, the maximum income allowed in most counties being lower than that for the Old Age Pension. I believe Dr. Stevenson of the Local Government Board has done his best to secure generous treatment for them. There is a government register of those receiving help but the Census of 1926 took no account of blindness, and there may be many blind people living with relations or with such small means as to prevent their receiving the State Pension or the allowance, who on this account are not on the register. If interest is to be aroused it is felt that a census such as the R.I.C. were good enough to take in an unofficial way for Mr. Rochfort Wade, is most desirable as

a register is necessary at the beginning of any scheme, for covering "all" the blind'.

Alice then went on to outline her case, setting forth her aims for the 'committee', testing the waters of acceptance with questions which undoubtedly needed answering in the treatment of the blind in Irish Society.

'Home visiting and home teaching societies have been invaluable in other countries in bringing to the blind in their homes the consolation of having their needs understood and of being taught to read for themselves, to make things of practical use and to earn something towards their own keep. Increased home visiting and early home visiting makes it possible for the right care to be given at the time it is needed; such as special treatment for blind babies and teaching on 'how to be blind' for those blinded in later life. A home teaching society such as this does not exist in the Irish Free State. The St. Vincent de Paul Society has been approached on the subject and have undertaken to carry on this work in those places where they have branches. If a central committee such as we are considering be started, it is hoped that an organisation may be gradually built up in Ireland similar in some ways to the National Institute in England, whose work, besides the production of Braille books, music and special apparatus, includes the higher education of the blind, their training in massage and inquiry into all problems connected with their welfare.

'The committee might well consider such questions as the following: Whether blind people in the Free State might not be allowed a greater margin of income when qualifying for help under the Blind Persons' Act and so be encouraged to earn for themselves?

Whether more opportunities might be given to blind boys for higher education and music and if there may not be openings for the employment of the blind in ways peculiar to Ireland such as that of work in creameries which has already been suggested?

'On receiving the report of St. Vincent de Paul on

the existing conditions, the question of training home teachers and visitors would arise and that of providing for the care of the blind in those districts where St. Vincent de Paul has no branches. Mrs. Hughes (who is here today) in County Tipperary and Miss Knox in Kilkenny, have already got in touch with their local blind people, with excellent results. As I am not a resident in Ireland I hope that this much needed work of caring for the blind will be taken up by the Irish themselves. I should suggest that a central committee or people interested in the blind be nominated (including representatives of the different institutions and Societies) with a proper Constitution and Bye-laws. If it is decided to have this Committee perhaps some of those present would undertake to consider the details. I should be pleased to arrange for further meetings or personal interviews until the work is started".

This was the most extensive public speech Alice Armitage was ever to give with regard to NCBI. As she told her auditors at that first meeting, 'My deafness makes it impossible for me to take the chair'. Dr. Moorhead agreed to do so "for this meeting only". Dr. Moorhead did not agree with Alice Armitage's decision to regard the meeting as private. He said this "is unwelcome to me when publicity is wanted".

Alice Armitage, as she would prove at subsequent meetings was well aware of the decorum and formality needed at meetings but she was also ably equipped to cut to the chase and would prove to be an adept back-room operator when need arose. In casting about for her "influential Roman Catholic" she had been put in touch with Denis Barrett. He had served with Nanette Quin's father Thomas Duke Norris and was well known in the ex-RIC and 'county set' circle. On his retirement from his position in the DMP, he was made Ireland's first Peace Commissioner. Her invitation to him was to prove propitious; he was to prove a stalwart support to her at the first meeting of The NCWBI at 5.00 p.m. at the Standard Hotel, 79-82 Harcourt Street, Dublin, on March 10th 1931 and for many years to come. ■

TO BE CONTINUED.

Your Independence

Some older people with sight loss may find that they need help with certain household tasks, like preparing meals, cooking or cleaning. Help at home is available both publicly and privately and here, we go through what is available and how to apply for it.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) offers a home help service, which is administered either through your local public health nurse, or through a hospital social worker, for those who are coming out of hospital. If you think you need help at home and make a request to your public health nurse, he/she will conduct an assessment with you in your home and recommend how much and what type of assistance you might benefit from.

The service is generally free to medical card holders, although people may be asked to make a contribution to the cost of the service. The HSE is not limited in the categories of people they can assist at home. However, the priorities are normally to provide a service to older people, families with small children where a parent has died or is seriously ill and people with disabilities.

The home help is expected to provide a set number of hours assistance each day or each week. The precise arrangements can usually be agreed between you and the HSE. The sort of work that a home help is normally required to do includes light cleaning, possibly

Home care – what are your options?

some shopping and cooking and laundry but it depends on your individual needs. Home helps are not expected to provide nursing or medical care.

In making your application for home care it can be useful to include a letter from your GP to support your claim, as well as a letter from other family members, if appropriate. Before making a recommendation, the public health nurse will consider your support system, looking at who is around you who may be able to provide assistance and what financial resources are available.

Each HSE area has a budget to manage home care in its area for the year. The Government is committed to enabling people to remain at home and so in 2010 provided €20 million additional funding nationally for home care. In spite of this, Danny Cahill, NCBI's regional manager for the North West region, has seen hours being cut for some service users in his area.

“We have seen hours cut for some people. In Donegal the services are stretched because, while our budgets are high, the population is rural and ageing and so demand for care within the community is high, even though the service is not limited to older people with disabilities. Families are often left to take on the responsibilities themselves, but that is not always possible. Even if you live with family, they may be out at work all day and the older person can feel



Home help is available for those who need extra support in order to remain at home.

very isolated. Home care is a vital service and one that can make the difference between people being able to stay at home and going into full time care,” according to Danny.

“It can take a lot to persuade someone to consider home help. They may be nervous about having someone in their home, for example, or about other people finding out that they require extra help at home. Our community resource workers can talk to people about what home help entails and can help them make an application to the public health nurse. A lot of the time the contact and the company is as important as the work the home help does around the house,” explains Danny.

With the growth in demand for home help, there has been an increase in the number of private agencies offering home care, with agencies offering anything from a half an hour per week to full-time 24-hour care. The Irish Private Healthcare Association is an alliance of various private home care companies which is lobbying to create standards for the provision of home care, an area which is currently unregulated.

Learning to Byte

Girls allowed @ IT Camp At Dundalk

During the November mid-term break last year, an IT camp was held at the Sensory Resource Centre in Dundalk. Presented by Róisín Mulligan, IT Trainer and Bernie Devlin, Community Resource Worker, the camp was offered to students between Junior Cert. and Leaving Cert. classes living in Louth. It was taken up by four young ladies from different parts of the county in mainstream education and provided an opportunity for the participants to meet, interact socially, provide peer support and forge friendships.

New IT skills

Stretched over two days, the objective of the IT camp was to provide the participants with a number of new IT skills. Several topics were offered to the girls who picked those most relevant to them given their current educational

status. Each participant had a different level of computability and a varying level in terms of requirements, so a happy medium was sought and found. The participants were both JAWS and Zoomtext users so the notes provided catered for both mouse-users and non-mouse users who use the keyboard only. Over the course of the camp, the topics covered were:

- Making a short presentation and the skills required to do so
- Using Skype for communication on-line
- Downloading audio books from www.audible.co.uk
- Saving files to and accessing files from a USB memory stick
- Using a search engine such as Google to search efficiently for information
- Accessing music on the Internet

- Using the accessibility (Ease of Access) options in Windows to customise the appearance of the Operating System.

Towards the end of the camp the girls enjoyed a “luxury” session and received some general advice from Laura Flynn a local beautician based in Dundalk. A follow-on session in personal make-up application, colour analysis and personal styling was suggested and is planned for early 2011. This greatly enhanced the experience for the girls.

I wish to thank Roisin, Bernie and Laura for their hard work, and excellent delivery of tips, tricks and advice.

— **Colette O’Sullivan Regional Manager for Dublin & North East.** ■

According to Julie Roberts of Comfort Keepers, a private home care agency, standards and monitoring are areas of concern for all those involved in home help. “We are pushing for regulation of the sector at the moment. Standards should include some kind of monitoring, such as a tele-monitoring system where the home help would phone in when they arrive and when they are leaving the person’s home. It may also include spot checks, internal monitoring by the agency and also external monitoring.”

Julie also outlined things that people can look for when choosing a home care provider. “The first

important thing would be to make sure that the carer has been vetted by the agency or the HSE and that they have Garda clearance, which everyone working in this area should have. You should also look at what experience they have and what training they have undertaken. For example, manual handling is compulsory. Another consideration would be what monitoring the agency undertakes, whether they do spot checks and what the feedback or complaints procedure is,” explains Julie.

There is also tax relief available for anyone who pays for home care — up to 41%, depending on the level of tax paid. If the person who

is availing of the care is not eligible to apply for tax relief, a relative can arrange to apply for it instead.

How to apply for home help

You can talk to your NCBI community resource worker about any difficulties you are having. They can help you make an application to your local public health nurse for home care. Community resource workers can be contacted on 1850 33 43 53. Alternatively you can apply directly to your public health nurse at your local health centre.

Further information on home care is available from the main hospitals, local health centres and also online. ■

The Tower of Able

Financial support from the Education and Culture DG of the European Commission will make it possible for Blind and partially sighted adults to learn new languages.

Education, skills and the ability to make a positive contribution to civil society are central to social inclusion. It is therefore crucial that teaching and training techniques adequately address the specific needs of blind and partially sighted people.

Two-year project

With the financial support of the Education and Culture DG of the European Commission, the EBU led a two-year project looking into how languages can be taught most effectively to visually impaired adults.

The project, which has just reached its conclusion, involved three other partners from countries of the EBU network: the Pan-cyprian Organisation of the Blind, Czech Blind United, and the Slovak Blind and Partially Sighted Union. All of them agreed on the fact that their national teaching infrastructures were not adapted to the specific needs of VI adults wishing to learn a foreign language.

The Languages Project



Existing non-adaptive approaches, techniques and teaching tools (interactivity, visual-based modules, pictograms, lack of materials in Braille and other accessible formats...) actually deter VI adults from choosing courses involving the development of this key skill.

From 2008 to 2010 the project enabled the partners to work together on the central issue of the social and professional integration of VI adults through the improvement of their accessibility to language education. In particular, partners focused their work on how to reinforce the competences of language teachers in mainstream settings.

Learn or update language skills

The final document "Good Practice For Improving Language Learning For Visually Impaired Adults" looks in detail at the situation of vision impaired adults in their countries, the curricula

of language teachers, the existing teaching approaches and tools for language learning and the extent to which these are adapted to the specific needs of VI adults wishing to learn or update their foreign language skills, and presents practical solutions and advice. It is available in Czech, English, French, Greek and Slovak on the EBU website at the address below.

Received positive feedback

EBU and its partners are very pleased with the outcome of this project, which has already received positive feedback. We encourage all those working in the field of adult language learning and teaching to download, use and disseminate the pedagogical tools developed during the project.

Visit the project page on the EBU website here:

<http://www.euroblind.org/projects-and-activities/projects/finished-projects/nr/39> . ■

Mrs. Quins News

DON'T Let it snow!

Ireland has had one of its coldest, snowiest winters on record. The severe weather caused hazardous conditions and made life difficult for many. Let's hope we have seen the last of it!



NCBI head office had its seasonal covering of the white stuff.



Don't forget your shovel — L-R: NCBI head office staff Brian Friel, financial controller, Mark Rahman, accounts officer, and Collyn Kenny IT support, clearing snow from the driveways and footpaths.

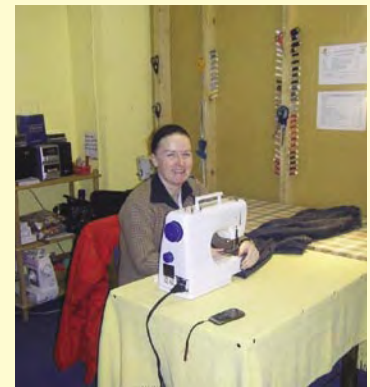


What a Dish! Icicles giving bad reception at the NCBI office in Letterkenny, Co. Donegal.

Make do and Mend

In a previous issue I talked about the managers in Limerick and Kilkenny, who had opened links to their Facebook sites in order to exchange ideas and notes about their shops. Mary Shanahan in particular, with her constantly changing pieces of information and clear photos of some of her stock regularly updated, has encouraged countless people to 'see for themselves.' Corina Merrigan in Ringsend is another enthusiast.

The new manager in Sligo town, Mary Looby is the latest to show an interest in linking Mrs Quin's to her personal site. I will be keeping an eye on all these and with luck, getting many more interested. When times are hard, we need to think of different ways of attracting customers – and of course, donations.



Lisa at her machine.

In Clonmel, part of our large shop has been revamped as a work room for an alteration service. This is still a new enterprise, but Lisa is most able and enthusiastic. This is a good example of turning existing shop space into something new. In these troubled times, many would rather pay to have a garment altered than go to the expense of a new one. I'll have more to say about this when I've seen it myself.

On October 3rd, Michelle Tobin, niece of Bernie Cooley, Edenderry manager, did a parachute jump for Mrs Quin's in Edenderry. She works for Enfield Opticians, who sponsored her and raised over €500.



Michelle with Instructor.

Our most recent fundraiser was a fashion show run by Mary Ann McCrann, manager in Ballagaderreen. As ever, Grainne Whiteside, Area Supervisor, was the driving force behind the venture, which made the fine sum of €2,500. Tommy Marrem was the compère on this most enjoyable night.

It's good to see managers and staff making the best of what they have and consulting together for fresh ideas. — **Marjorie Quarton.** ■



NCBI Key Fundraising Events and Activities for 2011

Parachute Jump

Fulfil your dream!

Phone 01 - 4525730

Climb Kilimanjaro Challenge

9th – 20th February

Each year, thousands of visitors to Tanzania attempt to fulfil their lofty ambitions by climbing Kilimanjaro, Africa's tallest mountain and one of the planet's coveted Seven Summits. Although there is much working in their favour — a mild climate, easily accessible slopes and an abundance of porters and guides, and no need for technical climbing abilities — many don't make it to the top. As we go to press, 72 year-old Irishman Tom O'Sullivan is attempting to scale the 5,895 meter mountain in aid of NCBI. Tom is taking part in this challenge with the assistance of the highly experienced charity tour operator group, Charity Challenge, who carry an overall success rate of 96 per cent for all their climbers. Our best wishes are with Tom as he takes on this tremendous challenge for NCBI next month.

Blazing Bikers: 32 County Challenge

29th April – 2nd May

The Blazing Bikers: 32 County Challenge will be taking place this year over the May bank holiday weekend. Bikers will cover a total distance of 1000km over all 32 counties in Ireland. For more information on this event please go to www.ncbi.ie or www.blazingbikers.com.

Women's Mini Marathon

6th June 2011

The Flora Women's Mini Marathon is the biggest all women's event of its kind in the world. This 10km run has grown steadily in numbers since it began in 1983 with its popularity increasing significantly over the last few years. Over those years nearly 740,000 women have entered the event with a record field of 40,397

taking part on Bank Holiday Monday, June 7th, 2010. To become involved and receive a sponsorship pack please call JP or Paddy in our fundraising team or email fundraising@ncbi.ie

Cycling — Austrian Masters World Cup

20th – 27th August

The Austrian Masters World Cup is held at St. Johann in Tirol every year during the last week of August. It is an open competition divided into age categories from Junior Level up to 80 plus. In association with the St. Johann Tourist Office, NCBI will be providing a very special week of cycling for our supporters around this event.

The Tirol Cycling Association has agreed that not only are the "hard core" cyclists at NCBI able to enter individually for our chosen distance time trials, they will keep the circuit and marshalling in place for one extra day so that we can have our own private race and time trials (including tandem cyclists). This is a great chance to be part of a marvellous event and to meet and socialise with cyclists from all over Europe. There will also be daily cycling excursions built around the main event to enable cyclists at all levels to fully enjoy the beautiful Austrian countryside.

Tyrolean Trek

20th – 27th August

Our friends in the St. Johann Tourist Office will also be helping to provide us with a week of fantastic walking in the Tirol, combining spectacular countryside during the day with world famous and welcoming hospitality in the evenings. By combining our trip with the cyclists in August we are assured the very best accommodation available at extremely favourable rates to make sure that as well as ensuring our trekkers are very well looked after, we can get the best value for money for NCBI and



its users and supporters. Indeed, the combination of our walkers and cyclists should make for a fantastic week of entertainment and a chance to catch up with some old friends.

ING New York City Marathon — 6th November 2011

Now in its fortieth year the New York City Marathon continues to grow in size and to be the leader among marathons around the world. This year do something special and take part in the world's most popular marathon whilst raising vital funds for NCBI. This is sure to be an experience of a life time. Please call JP in our fundraising team on 01-8821970 today for more information.

Escambray Encounter 18th November - 27th November 2011

NCBI is delighted to announce that it will be having a trip to Cuba in November. Starting in the vibrant capital and UNESCO World Heritage Site of Havana, trekkers will take in the beautiful countryside that Cuba has to offer including passing farms, coffee plantations and fruit plantations. The terrain is undulating, and in parts tough going, but with amazing views and tropical waterfalls to bathe in, it is well worth the effort. Trekkers will also visit the city of Santa Clara, famed for the final battle of the Cuban Revolution, the Sierra del Escambray and finally the beautiful city of Trinidad. Please call JP in our fundraising team today for more information. An exciting, once-in-a-lifetime trip awaits!!!

For more information on any of these events please contact JP of our fundraising team on **1850 33 43 53** or email jp.corcoran@ncbi.ie . ■

Irish Paralympics Success

On the 15th January the Irish Athletics Team under Head of Paralympic Athletics and two time Olympian, James Nolan, travelled to Christchurch in New Zealand to compete at the IPC World Athletics Championships. The team of eight athletes, included vision impaired athletes from Irish Blindsport, Ailish Dunne, Mountmellick, Co. Laois and Nadine Lattimore from Clontarf, Dublin. Some had represented Ireland at Paralympic level previously but some were world championship debutants. Fintan O'Donnell, (vision impaired) from Ennis, Co. Clare was the team physiotherapist. Unfortunately, Beijing Double Paralympic & World Champion, Jason Smyth was unable to attend due to injury.

The Championships were held from 21st – 30th January 2011 at the athletics stadium in QEII Park. Over 1000 athletes from 70 countries competed in this last major athletics championships before the London 2012 Paralympic Games. The Irish team got off to a dream start with New Ross native, Catherine Wayland taking the silver medal in the club throw competition, F51 Class. The success for Irish athletes continued with Beijing Gold medallist Michael McKillop setting a new World record in the 1500m, T37 class. However, Irish athletics also achieved another milestone with both Nadine Lattimore and Ailish Dunne making their World Championship debuts in the F11 Shot Putt final. Ailish Dunne produced a very consistent sequence of throws but saved her best until last where she produced her best throw of the day, achieving 6.62 metres to finish in sixth place overall. Ailish was disappointed not to achieve a personal best performance, but will build on this performance for the London Paralympic Games.

Nadine Lattimore produced her best throw of the competition with her first attempt. This throw of 6.12 meters put her in 7th position overall. The competition was eventually won by Chinese athlete Liangmin Zhang in a new Championship record of 9.61 meters. The successes of Irish Paralympic Athletes can be followed at:

www.paralympics.ie or

Facebook: [facebook.com/
paralympicsireland](https://www.facebook.com/paralympicsireland)

Twitter: twitter.com/ParalympicsIRE

Youtube: [youtube.com/ParalympicsIRE](https://www.youtube.com/ParalympicsIRE) . ■

Peter Phelan's Run

NCBI service user Peter Phelan talks about his experience of training for the Dublin Marathon.

Training for the Dublin city marathon began in the first week of March. I would always give myself three month's full training before the day and since I am more active than a lot of people I know, I find that sufficient. So ten weeks of hard training were completed when I received notice from Beaumont hospital that I would be having my second operation to help my epilepsy.

Surgery didn't go as well as we all thought and epilepsy has remained ever present in my every-day life. It has resulted in the loss of a significant part of my visual field and has made me feel twice as bad about taking the decision to go down the surgery route. However, I can't say I wasn't warned. My neuro-surgeon told me I would be left with a curtain like effect down my left eye and that is exactly what has happened.

In effect, it meant that to see anything on my left I must turn my head fully. I very easily walk past people, to whom I would normally say hello, without seeing them; knock over glasses; turn into walls — once I ran out in front of a car, only to swerve back in again.

Seven weeks resting post surgery and with only eleven weeks to go to the marathon I decided it was time to get going again. The majority of my hard training had been done so

Marathon Man

I was still reasonably fit; however I was still coming to terms with my new way of life. With this in mind I cut back on my usual strenuous regime and ran five miles each day from Tuesday to Friday and a long run every Sunday starting at 10 and working up to twenty three miles. I got used to running with my visual condition, learning to cope with traffic. I had set routes for training so that I would never get into trouble when approaching a cross roads or junction. My long early morning runs were calculated to avoid traffic.

The marathon came and went like Christmas — all that fuss and training for just one day! It started at 9am and with over 13,000 runners I thought I might have a little difficulty; luckily nothing major, apart from bumping into a couple of runners on my blind side and almost running into a lamp post — oh!, and running past a water station without seeing it. Initially I had planned which side of the road I would run on, to prevent bumping into people but this plan went out the window — I already knew the course, knew where to expect people and knew where the fast runners would separate from the slower ones to leave open space.

To make things easier for myself I went slowly for the first ten miles which meant I didn't break into much of a sweat. By then the field had opened up. This gave me free reign so I picked up my pace and ran a faster second half, finishing in 3hrs 27mins. ■

NCBI Roscommon Information Day and Lunch for Service Users

NCBI Roscommon held a very successful information day and lunch for service users in November in Gleeson's Townhouse, Roscommon Town.

The event allowed service users in County Roscommon to come and talk to their local community resource worker and I.T. Trainer, and view some equipment. People also had a chance to chat to other NCBI service users over lunch. Tony Scanlon, Community Resource Worker in Roscommon organised the event and over 70 people attended. Francis Kane, I.T. Trainer & Support Worker also attended and showed a range of equipment currently available from NCBI. Both Tony and Francis spoke to service users regarding the services provided by NCBI and Tony asked for feedback from people as to what they would like to see happening in the county in 2011.

Following the information session and lunch, entertainment was provided by Eamonn Kelly, and all involved had an interesting, informative, and enjoyable day. Thanks to everyone who attended and participated in all aspects of the day. — **Francis Kane**
I.T. Trainer & Support Worker
NCBI West. ■