

# inSight

Magazine

VOL. 22, No. 4. Winter 2019



**NCBI**

Working for People  
With Sight Loss



Run,  
Swim,  
Cycle ...

To Tokyo 2020

Vision impaired  
Paratriathlon runner  
Donnacha McCarthy  
in action with guide  
Bryan McCrystal.

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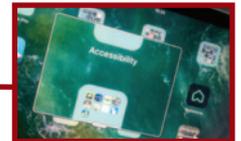
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## NCBI inSight

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# NCBI's Employment Campaign

Census statistics show that there are nearly 55,000 people living with sight loss in Ireland. It also revealed that the level of labour force participation amongst people with impaired vision is only 24.4%. This means that less than 1 in 4 people with impaired vision are currently actively participating in the labour force. The challenges which people with sight loss experience in relation to employment are rooted in widely held misconceptions about vision loss and the abilities of people who are blind and vision impaired. These mis-conceptions are held amongst the general public including employers. Overall, there is generally a lack of knowledge about how to create an inclusive, accessible workplace.

We will be rolling out a campaign relating to employment in January 2020. This campaign will be designed to create greater awareness of the abilities of people who are blind and vision impaired and the many roles which people can perform and excel in, given the right support. Employers often lack experience and information about working with people who are blind and vision impaired. For this reason, we will be launching a guide for employers as well as resources for employees. These guides will contain valuable sources of information on both our employment services and general advice on how to make the workplace an inclusive and accessible environment.

Throughout this campaign, we will be sharing



## **Employment debate.**

both positive and negative stories about the employment experiences of people living with sight loss. A large focus of this campaign will be to inform employers that there is minimal accommodation in employing a person who is blind or vision impaired. We will also be offering guidance about ways to facilitate an equal performance between all employees at job application and interview stages.

Being in employment is necessary to increase financial stability. However, being a contributing member of society has serious health benefits. Both a person's physical and mental wellbeing can be boosted by engaging in employment. The small portion of people living with sight loss who are currently in employment in Ireland needs to increase. In order for this to happen, attitudes need to be changed. Spreading awareness will be central to this campaign.

**Log onto our Facebook and twitter pages to find out more about the campaign and like, comment and share.**

# Making the Transport and the Build Environment Accessible

## Dublin Airport

NCBI made a detailed submission in response to the Commission for Aviation Regulation draft determination on Dublin Airport. We were alarmed the Commission was proposing a reduction in the number of wayfinding staff in the airport. The Commission argued the reduction in staff was justified if more screens and signage were erected for passengers to find their way. In our submission, we stressed the negative impact it would have on passengers who are blind and vision impaired. We will continue to monitor this situation closely.



**All forms of public transport must be made fully accessible.**

## The New Metrolink System

NCBI was invited to make a submission on the Metrolink scoping report. This provided us with an ideal opportunity to set out our position on all the accessibility features that should be included for people who are blind and vision impaired. These include reliable onboard and platform announcements, appropriate lighting, signage and ground demarcation. As this is a new piece of state infrastructure, there is no reason for there to be any accessibility issues or expensive retrofits.

## Limerick / Shannon Metropolitan Transport Strategy

NCBI responded to the proposed Limerick / Shannon metropolitan transport strategy. The full strategy will not be published until later, but we have already reacted to the initial plan. This provides us with an opportunity to try to shape the strategy to improve the public transport

provision for those who are blind and vision impaired living in the region.

## Kilkenny County Council Redesign of Ormond Street

We met with Kilkenny County Council along with advocates who were concerned at the Council's plan for the redesign of Ormond Street. Following the meeting, we conducted a review of some other problems that had been flagged by local NCBI staff and advocates, and subsequently made a detailed submission to the Council's planners. The main issue of concern is the growing number of uncontrolled crossing points popping up in the city.

## Access issues in your locality

If you are concerned about any access issues in your locality, do let us know by contacting the Policy and Advocacy team on Tel: 01 8307 033 or email: [campaigns@ncbi.ie](mailto:campaigns@ncbi.ie).

## Getting Involved in Advocacy



In September, a two-day training course took place in Athlone where ten more new advocates received training in campaigning skills. Our newly trained advocates will represent NCBI both on internal and external committees and groups.

This was the first time that NCBI has provided a campaigning skills training event outside of Dublin and therefore most course participants were from around the country. We had participants from Carlow, Galway, Laois, Leitrim and Cork.

Building on this, we held local advocacy meetings around the country to enable us to grow the numbers of people who are blind and vision impaired to actively participate in advocacy. These were informal information sessions that gave our service users an introduction to advocacy and encouraged them to get involved.

If you have a vision impairment and you did not make your local advocacy meeting, you can still get involved. We will be working on a number of campaign issues during 2020 in particular we will be putting together asks of election candidates in the upcoming General Election.

Let us know if you are interested in getting involved our advocacy work by contacting the Policy and Advocacy Team on **Tel: 01 8307033** or email: **campaigns@ncbi.ie**.

## What is the European Accessibility Act?



The European Accessibility Act (EAA) aims to improve accessibility across digital devices, websites and services. The EAA will cover accessibility of computer hardware and operating systems, ATMs, ticketing machines, check-in machines, phones and smartphones, tablets, TVs, online shopping, banking services, e-books and websites of transport companies. A range of products and services which receive EU funding will also need to comply with the rules of the EAA.

Overall, the EAA is a good step forward. For the first time, it sets out a comprehensive set of minimum requirements for businesses to make a range of products and services accessible and which will have to guide public procurement. However, it does fall short of what had been initially planned. It remains to be a digital act. It does not cover the built environment, tourism and urban transport and household appliances. Micro-enterprises are also exempt from having a legal obligation to provide accessible services.

The EAA is now a Directive and needs to be placed into national law and European standards. Member States, including Ireland, have three years to develop national laws that fulfil the obligations of the EAA.

# Tax entitlements for blind or vision impaired people

If you are blind or visually impaired, you may be entitled to certain tax credits and allowances. Tax credits and allowances reduce the amount of Income Tax you have to pay.

## Blind Person's Tax Credit

To qualify for this credit, your vision impairment must be that:

- your central visual acuity does not exceed 6/60 in your better eye, with correcting lenses

or

- your field of vision is limited so that the widest diameter of your visual field subtends an angle no greater than 20 degrees.

You must provide a medical certificate from your medical ophthalmologist, ophthalmic surgeon or optometrist stating:

- the degree of your blindness or vision impairment
- if the condition is temporary or permanent.

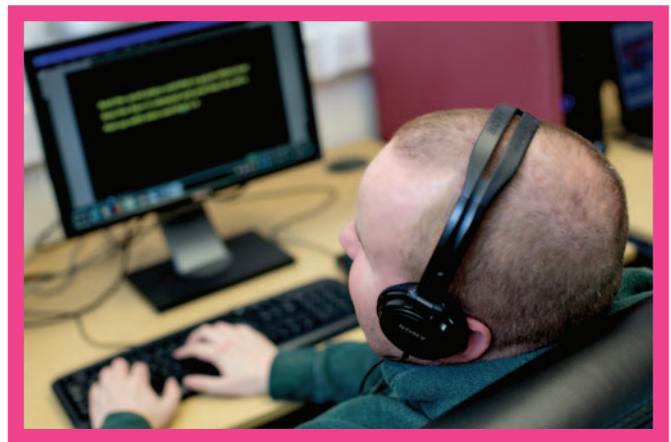
The Blind Person's Tax Credit for 2019 is:

- €1,650 for a single person
- €1,650 where one person in a marriage or civil partnership is blind
- €3,300 where both persons in a marriage or civil partnership are blind.

## Guide Dog Allowance

You can claim Guide Dog Allowance if you own a trained guide dog that was supplied by an accredited organisation.

You must provide Revenue with a letter from the



supplier of the dog confirming that you are the registered owner.

The allowance for 2019 is equal to a tax credit of €165.

You can find information about how to claim these and other tax reliefs you may be entitled to on [www.revenue.ie](http://www.revenue.ie).

## How to contact Revenue

If you are taxed under the PAYE system, phone either:

- our access officer on **01 4244229**
- our general line **01 7383636**.

If you are taxed under the self-assessment system, phone:

- our access officer on **091 547950** or
- our general line **01 7383630**.

**Contact details for Revenue's Access Officers is available on [www.revenue.ie](http://www.revenue.ie).**

# Access4All Programme

NCBI Iona Resource centre launched its Access4All Programme which aims to provide general disability awareness, sighted guide and audio commentary training to teams of connected volunteers linked with a sporting club around Ireland.

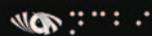
With the skills and awareness gained from our training and the resource pack provided, Access4All Volunteers will then be empowered to deliver a vital audio commentary service to people with disabilities and additional needs across Ireland.

If you are interested in this sports audio commentary, please visit <https://surveymonkey.com/r/z2wkgc6>

## Iona Resource Centre



For further information please contact Maggie on [Maggie.richardson@ncbi.ie](mailto:Maggie.richardson@ncbi.ie) or 086 6063112

  
**NCBI**  
Working for People  
with Sight Loss



## Leaving a Legacy

With our ageing population, the number of people needing to access our services is increasing every year. To provide these vital services, we need to continually raise funds and that's where you can help.

### You can help by remembering NCBI in your will

By making a gift, big or small, in your will to NCBI you will leave a legacy of help. Speak to your solicitor about how to leave a legacy in your will to NCBI.

For further information phone (01) 830 7033 or visit [www.ncbi.ie](http://www.ncbi.ie)  
Email: [fundraising@ncbi.ie](mailto:fundraising@ncbi.ie)

CHY 12673

# Bookshare Ireland — Supporting Equity of Access

NCBI is acutely aware that obtaining books and information in accessible formats is one of the biggest barriers to achievement for students with visual impairment in higher and further education. Sadly, less than 5% of all published material is released in an accessible format in Ireland due to copyright restrictions.

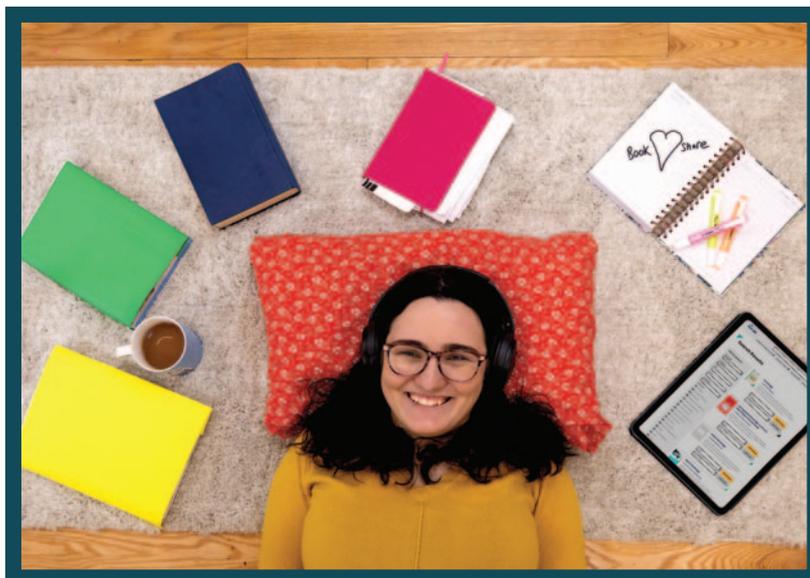
In response, the NCBI Library Access Service is proud to announce the launch of Bookshare.ie a major digital project which has been set up to make academic books and other materials accessible and readily available to students with print disabilities.

## What is print disability?

Print disability includes visual impairment, blindness, dyslexia, or any physical limitation in holding a printed book or text. Bookshare.ie is open to all universities, colleges and further education settings. Access officers and Disability Advisors will be encouraged to refer students with a print disability to Bookshare.ie. NCBI's lifecycle teams along with other service providers like Irish Wheelchair Association and Enable and any other professional staff who are supporting higher and further education students with print disability across Ireland are welcome to refer to the service.

## How does it work?

Eligible student readers can customise their reading experience in a way that suits them, with



instantaneous access to over 500,000 digital books in a variety of accessible formats including DAISY Audio, DAISY with Pictures, digital braille, PDF and Word. Students can then read and learn anytime on their computers, tablet, smartphones, assistive technology devices, and more.

## Collaborating with Publishers

Bookshare Ireland is currently working with Irish publishers to increase homegrown content available to readers and are pleased to welcome O'Brien Press, Gill and Oak Tree Press to the new platform. Collaboration with other publishers over the coming months will remain a priority for Bookshare Ireland in achieving greater equity of access for students with print disability in higher and further education in Ireland.

**To register students for this new service, please Sign Up at [Bookshare.ie](https://www.bookshare.ie)**

# Camp Abilities

Dr. Lauren Lieberman, founder of Camp Abilities was recently in Ireland as part of a month long Fulbright scholarship promoting Camp Abilities and the importance of physical activity for people with sight loss. NCBI hosted 3 workshops for professionals in NCBI Tallaght, NCBI Cork and Portlaoise College provided by Dr. Lieberman in addition to running a “Mini Camp Abilities” in Portlaoise.



**L-R: NCBI staff Leanne Taylor, Caimin Fox, Aoife Buckley, Joe Geraghty, Vision Sports Ireland and Dr. Lauren Lieberman.**

Dr. Lauren J. Lieberman Ph.D. is a Distinguished Service Professor in the Kinesiology Department in Brockport State University, New York. She taught in the Deafblind programme and coached three sports at The Perkins School for the Blind. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in Adapted Physical Education and co-directs The Institute on Movement Studies for Individuals with Visual Impairments (IMSVI) at The College at Brockport. It was wonderful to have her share her knowledge, experience and enthusiasm.

The focus of the workshops was to promote physical activity for children who are visually impaired, and to look at the strategies and adaptations that may be required to make all sports accessible to them. The link between being physically active and becoming an efficient, independent traveller in later life was made and reinforced throughout the session. It is essential that cane and guide dog users are mentally and physically robust. It is hard work to walk with a cane or guide dog, every step is more difficult. It is one of the most significant challenges for someone with low or no vision.

Research shows that the lack of independent travel skills can lead to social isolation and it has been associated with low numbers of people with vision impairment in third level education and the workforce.

The “Mini Campabilities” sports camp was held on Tuesday 15th October in Portlaoise College in conjunction with Offaly and Laois Sports Partnerships. Vision Sports Ireland also assisted at the event. It was attended by 22 children who participated in a range of sports including wrestling, goalball, soccer, scooch and athletics.

Children were offered the opportunity to try new sports and activities that they may not have had the chance to do in the past. By giving children the chance to try new activities, not only can they find something they really enjoy, but their self-esteem can increase, often giving them the confidence to advocate for themselves in their own schools and communities.

# Vision Impairment Training with Specsavers Staff



**Specsavers staff,  
Letterkenny,  
Co. Donegal.**

Keen to build on the relationship already established with many Specsavers branches and to ensure vision rehabilitation services continues to be provided to all those who need them, NCBI staff have been providing in-service training events to Specsavers staff in stores throughout the country. NCBI emphasised to Specsavers staff how people benefit most from early assessment, support and intervention as they are most likely to hold on to the independence they have and also benefit more from learning new skills and techniques which will be beneficial to them now and into the future. A delay in referral can often mean the person will have lost some life skills as well as confidence to learn.

Staff also highlighted that with their patient's consent a referral can be made at any time. Our online referral process makes referring patients

quick and easy. There is a form specifically for eye health professionals which asks for all the relevant details of the patient. Once submitted the referral is allocated to an NCBI staff member who will contact the person initially by telephone to ascertain their issues and with agreement arrange to meet with them face to face in one of our service centres located around the country.

At the end of the session each member of Specsavers staff was provided with a copy of our new booklet specifically designed for Optometrists which outlines all of our services, how to refer and where we are located. Our commitment to communicating with not only Specsavers staff but with other eye health specialists continues. Our aim is that everyone who requires vision rehabilitation services can access them as easily and as quickly as they need.

## OT placement pilot with Trinity College Dublin

In 2020 in collaboration with Trinity College Dublin, NCBI Occupational Therapists who work as Community Resource Workers across Dublin will facilitate student placements. Occupational therapists help people to do the everyday activities that they want to do and need to do when faced with illness, injury, disability or challenging life events.

Students will be supported in their integration of theory-based learning with practice in this role emerging placement setting. Role-emerging placements are increasingly being used within occupational therapy to help students develop the skills, knowledge and attributes needed to become the therapists of tomorrow.

These placements will give students the unique opportunity to assess a service user's visual impairment, understand how this impacts their day-to-day living and what recommendations can be made to assist them. This could include a magnifier, apps for their phone, assistive technology or mobility training.

Students will work with adults and children observing how they are supported to seek or remain in employment and or education through utilizing their occupational therapy skills in problem solving solutions, assessment of needs, specific treatment planning and collaboration with other professionals and services. Their learning needs will be facilitated in line with CORU requirements.

This new relationship between NCBI and Trinity College Dublin will help promote the work we do here at NCBI and give the therapists of tomorrow another potential avenue and pause for thought with their career post- graduation.

## 'Learning, Employment & Technology' Seminar

During September we held a seminar on 'Learning, Employment & Technology' in Cork. We reached out to service users between the ages of 17 and 28 years where vision loss is the primary disability.

The purpose of the seminar was to give practical advice and support to young people when transitioning between education and employment. Our keynote speaker was Claire Kennelly, founder of Inclusive Cork & the Disruptability Podcast. Clare has many years of teaching experience and is vision impaired. Clare is personally and professionally passionate about disability employment and universal design.

We facilitated a panel session, which included people working in various areas of employment who spoke about navigating employment and education with a vision impairment. Speakers offered valuable advice and strategies for our attendees to assist them to become work ready. We also had speakers from support organisations; UCC Disability Support Service, Department of Employment & Social Protection, Employability and NCBI support services who outlined the varying supports available in third level education and employment.

A range of assistive technology was also demonstrated offering people an opportunity to see the wide range available. Feedback from the day has been very positive from both young people and their parents.

## NCBI welcomes Vision Sports Ireland into our family



Vision Sports Ireland have been our friends since their founding 30 years ago. We have been with them through thick and thin with many supports including grant aid, provision of office space, communications and HR.

At recent General Meetings it was agreed by both organisations that Vision Sports Ireland would merge as an NCBI subsidiary. Vision Sports Ireland would retain its own constitution, identity and ethos as well as its company and charity status.

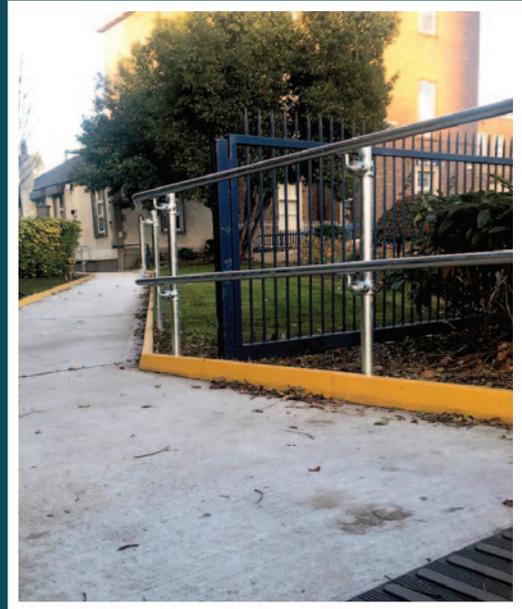
The benefits for both NCBI and Vision Sports Ireland is immense. We can now reach out and bring more vision impaired people to the great outdoors with the associated benefit of better health, wellbeing and quality of life.

Vision Sports Ireland will be able to further develop sport and leisure under the NCBI umbrella. As part of the NCBI family Vision Sports Ireland will benefit from shared services including insurance, professional, IT, office and rent. The NCBI will provide supports for HR, communications, fundraising and good governance.

NCBI will build on its current impressive investment in sport and leisure. In terms of voluntary, corporate and state funding the principle of donor intent will be totally honoured.

Let's look forward to a bright and healthy future as we welcome Vision Sports Ireland on board.

## Improved Pedestrian Access at NCBI Whitworth Road



**A new accessible footpath is now in place for any pedestrians accessing the NCBI offices on Whitworth Rd, Drumcondra.**

**This path enables pedestrians to access the site without using the vehicular entrance which can pose a risk to individual safety. Pedestrians are encouraged to use the new footpath by entering a new gateway which is located to the left of the vehicular entrance when facing the NCBI offices.**

**Pedestrians walk along the path to a junction and can opt to turn right to the Head Office or continue ahead to the National Training Centre.**

**Individuals requiring additional wayfinding information should contact Jodie McGrielle on 018821955.**

# Say yes to the dress... and our planet!

For many brides-to-be choosing a wedding dress is one of the most critical aspects of planning a wedding. Although wedding dress shopping is a fun and exciting part of any wedding preparation, it can also be one of the most stressful. The saturation of TV programmes like 'Say yes to the dress' and 'Don't tell the bride' bombards you with information on gowns.



Choosing what to wear that will reflect your personality on one of the most important days of your life is daunting. Fishtail? Empire line? Ball gown? A-line? It can all get a little confusing, and that's even before you mention the price or its environmental impact.

By the time you have finally said "yes to that dress", you are looking at on average €1,697 for that priceless piece. And one wedding dress alone is estimated to take 9000 litres of water to make. To put it into perspective, that is the amount of water a person on the African continent needs to live for 450 days, wasteful right?

In a world of throw away culture and even faster fashion, finding a wedding dress that will save the world, while making you feel like a princess is something that may seem unachievable.



NCBI Bridal shop has changed this and can now help you to have it all.

You can find the dress of your dreams at a price you like and know you are doing your small, but significant bit for the environment. Not to mention the money saved can be put towards a doughnut wall or prosecco truck, or even that well-deserved honeymoon!

NCBI Bridal Boutique in Naas is a dedicated bridal charity shop, where you can make an appointment, bring your bridal party and make a day of it. We also have an incredible collection of never before worn wedding dresses, that have been donated by bridal stores all over the country. Yes, hundreds of brand new wedding dresses that will even satisfy the most superstitious of us.

We know that you want everything to be perfect on your special day so, we do our utmost to make sure that the dresses are of the highest quality. Just like you would find in any bridal shop up and down the country.

**Whether you are trying to be as environmentally conscious as possible or just love a bargain, checking out our NCBI bridal boutique in Naas is a no no-brainer.**

# Paralympic games in sight for

**“I found that once I took up sport again it really helped my self-confidence and my coordination, moving around and getting out and about on my own.”**

inSight magazine talks to International 5-a-side footballer turned Triathlon champion Donnacha McCarthy who gave us an insight into the NCBI and Vision Sports Ireland merger and his journey from West Cork to training for the Tokyo Paralympics.

Donnacha who works for Vodafone met us with his guide dog Aero. “I am 29 now. I lost my sight in 2001 due to developing leukaemia which affected my eyesight. Before that, I would have been involved in sport through my local GAA club, doing both football and hurling.

“After losing my sight, it took me quite a while to get back to sport. I didn’t know what was out there in terms of vision impaired sports, coupled with the fact that I lived in the countryside, I didn’t have much access to facilities. When I went to University I got back into sports. Initially, it was 5-a-side football, I attended a training day that was held in conjunction with Vision Sports Ireland and the FAI ‘Football for All’ programme, and I loved it. That was in 2012, and it grew from there, thanks to Vision Sports Ireland and the coaches available. In 2017, we competed in our first international tournament, the European qualifiers. Then in 2018, we were proud to be runners-up in another European cup.”

Since then, Donnacha explains that Vision Sports Ireland have been working hard to encourage new budding Beckhams to join. “It has taken a little bit of a back step at the



**Donnacha McCarthy, stoking, with guide Dave Tilly.**

moment as they are focusing on more player recruitment.”

Donnacha explains how the game is played. “We use a 40m x 20m Astro pitch and all of the players are blindfolded. The goalkeepers are sighted, one coach is on the halfway line and another coach is at the opponents’ goal, so you know where you are shooting. The ball has ball bearings in it so you can hear it. The rest is all just basic communication.

“Besides playing football, I took up running and jogging a couple of days a week. As I got fitter, I joined my local running club where I heard about the Paratriathlon. At the time, I was purely looking at running events or duathlon events (running and cycling) as I couldn’t swim. I was teamed up with my guide, who taught me to swim. In 2017, I did my first international triathlon race in Rotterdam and it has snowballed since then. In May, 2018, I entered a competition at Eton Dorney, UK, and I finished 9th. A month later I competed in Canada and came third. Then the European championships two weeks later. In 2018 I also did the Liffey

# Donnacha

swim. I think I am the first blind person to do the Liffey Swim, it was my longest swim to date at 2.5km.

“Vision Sports Ireland were instrumental in getting me to do the Liffey Swim. They funded me to join a local swimming club and that really brought my swimming on because I was swimming with other swimmers in a lane, who were all sighted. I was not tethered to anyone doing this, I used the lane ropes and counted my stroke so I wouldn't swim into the wall. I am always covered in cuts and bruises from swimming. At the minute I am still competing at triathlons, I am hoping to qualify to compete in Tokyo for the Paralympics 2020. I have done four races so far this year.” Donnacha explains how he fits it all in: “I usually train in the mornings before work, there is also a gym in our office, so I can do sessions at lunchtime too. It's just about time management.”

The merger of Vision Sports Ireland with NCBI is something that Donnacha is passionate about: “I think NCBI and Vision Sports Ireland amalgamating is a positive move. Their respective values are aligned, and NCBI will be able to give Vision Sports Ireland more reach and access to funds to do more. It will cater to a broader audience. From NCBI's point of view, sport is a massive thing in terms of helping people who have acquired sight loss in their rehabilitation. Sport is such an essential part of life. Still, especially for those with vision impairment, not just for fitness but for socialising, and for meeting people who have been through similar experiences as yourself, it works as a peer support group. I found living in the West of Cork; it took me quite a while to come to terms with my sight loss because I didn't have access to the NCBI services or the Vision Sports Ireland service that I would have,



**Donnacha McCarthy, brings up the rear with guide Dave Tilly.**

had I been living in a city like Cork or Dublin.

“I found once I took up sport again it really helped my self-confidence and my coordination, moving around and getting out and about on my own. Especially football, you run around the pitch, unaided, it can be a bit daunting at the start. Once you get used to it, it's a skill you can bring into the rest of your life whether that's moving around the house or the office more efficiently. You learn to use the sounds around you to navigate.

“It's great to be involved in local sport, every town in Ireland has a GAA club, it's central to community cohesion. Having access and ability to do vision impaired sport is fantastic! Vision Sports Ireland are often teaming up with sighted sports partners to incorporate vision impaired sport into the local teams.”

Donnacha is a member of the NCBI Group Board, and a member of Vision Sports Ireland. He hopes to continue to build on the incredible progress in bringing sports to those who are blind and vision impaired in Ireland.

**If you are interested in getting involved in activities run by vision sports contact [Alex@visionsport.ie](mailto:Alex@visionsport.ie) or log onto [www.visionsports.ie](http://www.visionsports.ie) for more.**

## NCBI takes on UN for Dine in the Dark

NCBI had the pleasure of being in New York on October 23rd to bring its Dine in the Dark initiative to the UN, where nearly 60 UN ambassadors, policy makers and leaders from global nongovernmental organisations took part. It was the ideal platform to highlight to international decision makers the importance of investing in quality eye health care.

Chis White, NCBI CEO acted as MC for the night and its timing was perfect given the recent launch of the WHO first ever report on Vision. It reinforces the need for greater investment in quality eye health care such as accessible screening and treatment across the globe especially given the majority of sight loss cases are preventable.

The staff were trained in advance of the event, guiding them on the importance of verbal communication with the diners on where their cutlery, glasses, napkins etc were situated. The menu was curated by Christine Ha, the first-ever blind contestant and winner of MasterChef USA. She began her cooking career after being diagnosed with a central nervous system disorder that led to almost complete loss of vision. For her, the Dine in the Dark experience



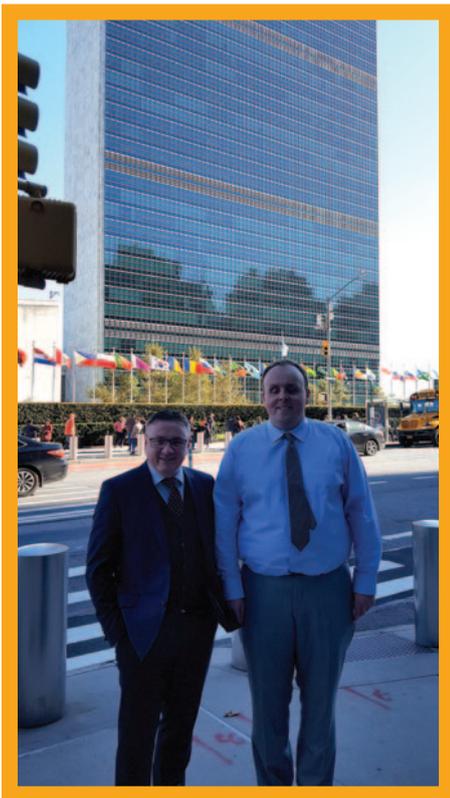
**ABOVE, L-R: Susan Schwartz and Mike Hodin, Global Coalition on Aging, Senator Martin Conway, Christine Ha, Chris White NCBI, Alan Morse, Lighthouse Guild, Melissa Mitchell, Global Coalition on Aging.**

puts sighted people in her shoes and makes them aware of the types of challenges those who are blind or vision impaired come across on a daily basis.

‘At the UN, ambassadors and other global decision-makers gained a first-hand appreciation of our sense of sight and what we can and should be doing to promote eye health for all,’ explained Ha.

Many of the guests described how isolating the experience is because of their inability to pick up on non-verbal cues, how intently they listened to conversations and the challenge of not spilling food or drinks.

The event was co-hosted by the Global Coalition on Aging, the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs and the Permanent Mission of Antigua and Barbuda to the UN along with three leading organizations addressing vision loss. It was sponsored by Novartis.



**Pictured near the UN Building in New York, L-R: Chris White, NCBI CEO, and Kevin Kelly, Head of Advocacy.**

## NCBI wins award

NCBI was delighted to win the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council Best 'Not for Profit Business' award from the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Chamber. It was an honour to be nominated and have our services in the area recognised.



**Pictured at the Awards: L-R: Alan Breathnach, NCBI National Services Manager; Mabel Cruise NCBI supporter; Minister Mary Mitchell O'Connor; Chris White, NCBI CEO.**

## Young students support World Sight Day 2019

A group of students on the street in Dublin supporting NCBI's World Sight Day, 2019, which was held on October 10th. This is a new national campaign promoting awareness of sight loss and raising vital funds to transform opportunities for people with sight loss.



# Smart Home Technology – The Practical Benefits

**By Joe Lonergan –  
Technology Specialist  
& Trainer**

Most of us are aware of smart speakers such as Amazon Echo and Google Home assistant. It's always a good idea to hear how they can be used in our day to day lives as someone living with a visual impairment.

Smart speakers can be activated with your voice by saying the wake word 'Alexa' or 'Hey Google'.

I use these devices every day to do things like:

- Ask for the weather forecast
- Set a reminder
- Set a timer
- Play music from a subscription service such as Spotify or Amazon Music
- Play an audio book from Audible
- Play a podcast
- Play a radio station
- Read me the news
- Turn on and off lights when paired with smart light bulbs.

Smart home technology comes into its own when you pair these speakers / assistants with other devices to create a personal independent living space in your home.

For example, you can control your heating by pairing your smart phone or smart assistant with a Nest thermostat. This allows you to turn on or off your heating independently, set a timer and set the right temperature for you. You can also work it remotely when you are away from your home. Other thermostats are available but I find this one to be the most accessible.

Another very good addition to your connected home is a video doorbell such as a Nest Hello Doorbell or the Ring Video Doorbell. These



doorbells can be used to monitor who is at your front door before you open it. You can talk to whoever is outside using your smart speaker. These products give you added security and make you feel less vulnerable. They also make it easier to deal with cold callers and other nuisance visitors.

I also use SmartThings App from Samsung. I have connected this to a Samsung smart washing machine and for the first time this has opened all the features of a washing machine for people with a vision impairment.

Rather than just having a bump on 40 degrees and pressing start, you can connect your machine to the SmartThings app on your phone and go through the different cycles such as, cotton, wool, dark, delicates etc. You can select your preferred temperature and then click start. These are just a few examples of how I use technology to make my home more accessible.

**If you want to know more about how Smart Technology can help you in your day to day life and be more independent call the NCBI Labs Helpdesk and arrange a demo.**

# Apple Doubles Down on Accessibility

**By Kyran O'Mahoney – NCBI CTO,  
JP Corcoran & Sean Doran – Tech-  
nology Specialists & Trainers**

Apple has always been ahead of the curve when it comes to native accessibility features in its Operating Systems. Its native screen reader “VoiceOver” revolutionised mobile use for blind and vision impaired users by allowing them to enjoy all aspects of smart devices that fully sighted people enjoy.

In October of this year Apple released iOS 13, iPadOS and macOS Catalina.

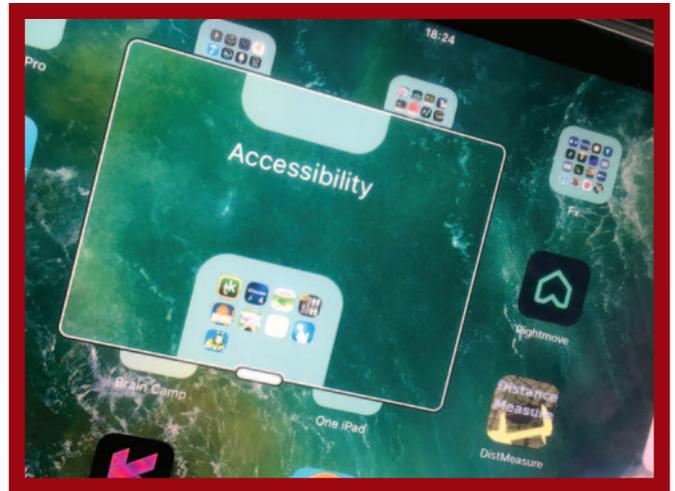
## Front and Centre

In previous iOS versions accessibility features were hidden away deep in sub-menus. We had to go Settings, then to General and then look for the Accessibility settings, but in iOS 13 and iPad OS these settings are near the top of the first settings page. This allows users to access them faster and puts them front and centre and more easy to find for users unfamiliar with them.

## The Usual Suspects

All the typical features that we all know are still there.

- VoiceOver – the hugely popular screen reader that lets users operate their iOS device without the need to see the screen
- Zoom – the screen magnifier that works wherever you are in iOS
- Magnifier – the object magnifier tool that lets you use your iPhone or iPad as a magnifying glass
- Speak Screen – the convenient and easy-to-use iOS feature that lets you use your iPhone and iPad to read websites and apps aloud.

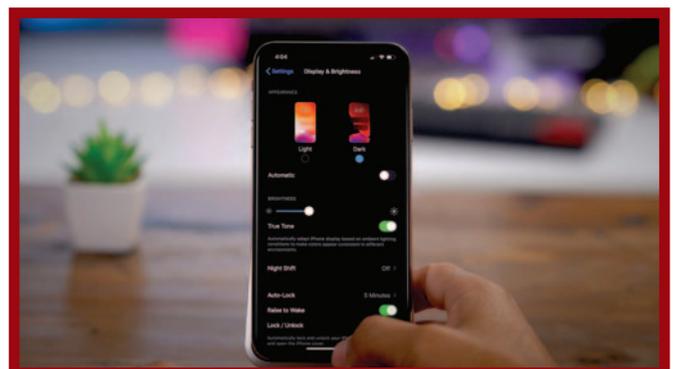


There are also some notable improvements such as the implementation of voice with neutral Text to Speech. This allows Siri (the device’s virtual assistant) to speak more naturally and also to learn from our voices making dictation better over repeated use.

## The New Arrivals

### Dark Mode

iOS and iPad OS now come with the option of Dark Mode. The menu system traditionally had a white background with black text. This could sometimes affect people with glare sensitivity. Dark Mode allows us to change this to White Text on a Black background. Dark Mode now carries over to a lot of native apps like Mail and Safari and is expected to be supported by many Third Party Apps.



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### New Emoji

iOS 13.2 and iPadOS 13.2 Apple introduced over 70 brand-new emoji characters including 13 emoji characters that are disability-themed. These include a guide dog, a woman with a white cane, a man with a white cane, and an ear with a hearing aid. These are all accessible with VoiceOver.



### iOS and iPad OS Mouse Support

For the first time on iPhones and iPads, users can connect a Bluetooth or wired mouse. This allows low vision users to be more productive when using these devices with a mouse combined with their favourite accessibility settings



### macOS Catalina

macOS Catalina, the latest operating system for Mac, comes with many of the same features we are already familiar with in iOS such as



VoiceOver and Zoom. These are native to the system and don't have to be installed or bought separately. In the long term this offers huge savings over buying a PC and then additional software to allow them to be accessible.

### Accurate Dictation

Apple has improved the voice control feature using the Siri speech recognition engine so you get the latest advances in machine learning for audio-to-text transcription. You can now also use custom words when you are writing documents or emailing about a favourite topic.

### Comprehensive App Navigation

With app navigation you can rely entirely on your voice to navigate an app. Comprehensive navigation is provided by navigation commands, names of accessibility labels, numbers and grids. Navigation commands give you quick ways to interact with macOS and apps. You can open apps, search the web, open Spotlight and more.

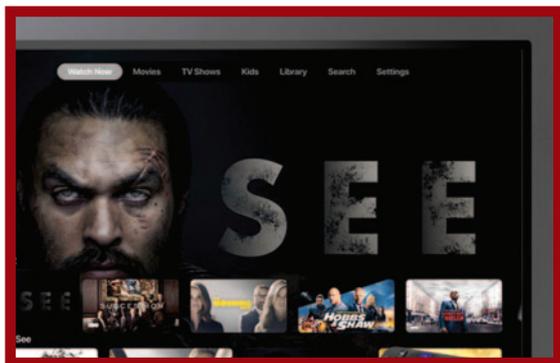
### Zoom Display

One of my favourite features has now got even better — while using a second display, you can see the same screen up close and at a distance simultaneously. You can keep one monitor zoomed in and another at a standard resolution. Or keep a personal Mac zoomed in while giving a presentation.

## Tint your entire display

A new display option lets you tint your entire screen using a colour of your choice. Some users may find that certain colour tints help make text easier to read.

## Apple TV+



November 1st was the worldwide launch date of Apple TV Plus, Apple's new streaming service available on the Apple TV app on iPhone, iPad, Apple TV, Mac and other platforms. So what exactly makes Apple TV Plus stand out from other streaming services and how accessible is it for blind and low vision users?

What's exciting about this service for those that are visually impaired or blind is that the app supports all of the accessibility features that you love and EVERY piece of new content that Apple is producing will have full audio descriptions.

For the audiophiles among us we are about to get geeky – hang in there! The audio descriptions on this new TV service are based on the Dolby Atmos standard which will make the experience for those using audio descriptions even more immersive. In the NCBI Head Office we have a dedicated demo area where you can see any of the devices mentioned in these articles. If you need any help with purchases or would like advice and support you can contact the NCBI Labs Technology Helpdesk.

## NCBI Labs



**The technology function in NCBI has a new name! – NCBI Labs.**

NCBI Labs will be focused on bringing you the latest in technological innovation and training for people with sight loss. We have lots of exciting developments coming in 2020 and look forward to announcing them in the coming months.

### **NCBI Labs Technology Helpdesk**

The NCBI Labs Technology Helpdesk offers a dedicated support line and email address for technical support related to assistive and mainstream technology.

This service is free for people with sight loss and their families. We also offer technical advice on assistive technology to schools and employers.

**The NCBI Labs Helpdesk is operated between 09:00 to 17:00 Monday to Friday.  
Call us nationwide: 1850 92 30 60 or 01 531 2975 or email: [labs@ncbi.ie](mailto:labs@ncbi.ie)**



## Chapter V host their first Dine in the Dark

2019 marks the fourth year that NCBI has rolled out a Dine in the Dark campaign. This immersive experience challenges people to dine blindfolded to give them some idea of the difficulties faced by those who are blind or vision impaired.

Groups all over the country have taken part in Dine in the Dark and this year has seen another slew of restaurants across Ireland register to host an event. In addition to its fundraising aims, Dine in the Dark works to increase participants' understanding and empathy for those affected by sight loss. One of the events that took place earlier this year was hosted by Ellie and Conor McCabrey in their Michelin 2020 listed restaurant, Chapter V in Moy, Dungannon, Co. Tyrone.

Speaking about getting involved with the event, Ellie says she had personal reasons to host the event: "I went to The Batch Loaf's event last year and thought it was absolutely amazing. Also my mother has been affected by retina detachment and glaucoma recently so it's a cause that has become very close to my heart."

She also described the various reactions of her patrons; "Everyone loved it, absolutely loved it! One man's brother lost his sight a while ago and he used to never understand why his brother took longer to eat. And then, after our night, he



### Diners in the Dark at Chapter V.

got it. People were texting me and phoning me the next day to say how much they enjoyed it. I think, we all know about sight loss, but it takes something like Dine in the Dark to really bring it home to you."

"It was really good for my staff too. It was a tough service for them but it has definitely made them more aware. And they honestly really enjoyed it. I would love to see more restaurants getting on board and hosting their own event."

Our thanks to everyone who has hosted or taken part in Dine in the Dark, we appreciate your support so much. Dine in the Dark events are happening in various venues across Ireland from November to January.

**Visit [www.dineinthedark.ie](http://www.dineinthedark.ie) to find your nearest one!**

## NCBI Tree of Light



The NCBI Tree of Light is an unique symbol of hope. Each light is sponsored by a company or an individual (each light on the tree costs only €250). Your support of the Tree of Light enables NCBI to help people like Josh and their families.

Josh is 8 years old, he is a bright happy young boy, loves to draw, here is a picture of the Minion he drew using a lamp and board he got from NCBI. The budding artist and entrepreneur sold his drawings at Ablefest this year. “Josh was diagnosed with albinism when he was four days old and has less than 10% vision,” Kevin his Dad recalls. “It was a very anxious time for us. NCBI were a great support network and were able to put our minds at ease. We are grateful for all of the support that the staff continue to give us. Josh is thriving and we



**Robbie Henshaw with young NCBI service users and (inset) Josh's drawing.**

cannot wait to see what the future holds for him.”

**Please support our Tree of Light and enable us to continue this vital work.**

## NCBI Northwest service users Peer Support group



**NCBI's Northwest region's services users Peer Support group pictured at their outing. NCBI actively fosters peer support in all its regions throughout the 26 counties. Contact NCBI for more information on this valuable social support for blind and vision impaired people.**

## NCBI Camino Join us in 2020!



11 of us embarked on the Camino, from September 15th-21st. The route taken was The Camino Portugues, starting in Valenca, Portugal, and ending in Santiago De Compostela, Spain. “We walked 140Km over five days through beautiful towns, vineyards, forests and coastlines. The experience was fantastic, it truly is so peaceful and simple, your only job is to walk and chat to all the other pilgrims you meet along the way.” – **Joanne McCarney, NCBI.**

If you would love to join our Camino trip, heading out September 2020, contact: [joanne.mccarney@ncbi.ie](mailto:joanne.mccarney@ncbi.ie) .

# Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir

As 2019 draws to a close, NCBI would like to thank one and all who kindly volunteered their time to support our fundraising ventures during the year. We can't do it without you!

Please do keep up to date with up-coming events by visiting our social media pages and reading the 'Insight'. Tell your family and friends and above all keep that wonderful support coming. We know your time is valuable and we value that time you spend fundraising for NCBI.

We extend our best wishes to all over the Christmas period and into the New Year 2020.



**VISION 2020**  
Dublin, Ireland

## IMAGINING THE IMPOSSIBLE

13th International Low Vision Conference  
by the International Society for Low Vision  
Research and Rehabilitation

Sunday 12th - Thursday 16th July 2020  
The Convention Centre Dublin – Ireland  
[www.vision2020dublin.com](http://www.vision2020dublin.com)



**Hosted by:** VISPA (Vision impaired service provider's alliance)  
VISPA Organisation members are: NCBI, ChildVision, Irish Guide Dogs, Fighting Blindness