



NCBI

Working for People
With Sight Loss

Councillor Peter Ryan



Paralympic Cyclist and Politician

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We wish all our readers and service users a Merry Christmas and hopefully, a brighter New Year. Stay Safe! Stay in touch with NCBI as we continue to bring our vital services to blind and vision impaired people throughout Ireland.

Try your luck and spread the word about NCBI's NEW 'eye can' Weekly Lottery. Great Prizes!



NCBI inSight

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'Check-in and Chat' Initiative



We are all becoming aware of the effects of social isolation on our mental health during the current COVID-19 restrictions. So, there's no better time to check-in with each other and have a chat.

We are in constant contact with service users every day and we hear how people are managing their circumstances. We also have a plethora of talented advocates within our advocacy network, whose skills we try to put to good use.

Indeed, the idea for check-in and chat meetings came from our advocates, who identified the need for people to connect more and get to know each other in a relaxed environment. And so, the weekly Check-in and Chat meetings were born and are being hosted by our advocates on the Zoom platform. These meetings

are open to anyone across the country who is blind or vision impaired.

To join simply click on the Zoom link below and your host will give you access to the meeting, or email us on Campaigns@ncbi.ie and we will send you the link. Zoom is free to download as an APP on your phone <https://zoom.us/download>

Check in and Chat meetings:

When: Every Thursday

Time: 11am-1pm (join for as long as you want)

Zoom link:<https://zoom.us/j/99048628214>

Having problems connecting to the meeting?

Call NCBI Labs on **01-5312975**.

Come along and meet some new friends....

Netflix during lockdown!

During COVID-19 restrictions, most of us probably feel like we have watched all that Netflix has to offer. However, its catalogue often updates so you may have missed some movies or series recently added, many of which have audio description as a feature on them. Here are some recommendations.

Sweet Magnolias

A favourite this year. This series was released by Netflix in May 2020 and showcases the relationship between three main characters and how they navigate their messy lives together with love, laughter and friendship. Very engaging and easy to watch. A feel-good series!

Love is blind

Another series with mixed reviews. The show is based on a love experiment to see if people can fall in love without seeing their significant other first. It is funny and packed with drama. It might take a couple of episodes to get you interested, but it's quite addictive thereafter.

Eurovision

Eurovision with Will Ferrell is a very funny film and easy to watch. The film is centred around the dream of young people to go to sing in the Eurovision against the wishes of their parents. If you like the traditional Eurovision concept, or Will Ferrell's acting, then you'll probably enjoy this movie.

Other new releases worth watching that have audio description are:

- The Witcher
- Million-dollar Beach House

- Next in Fashion
- Fear City
- Away

Classics:

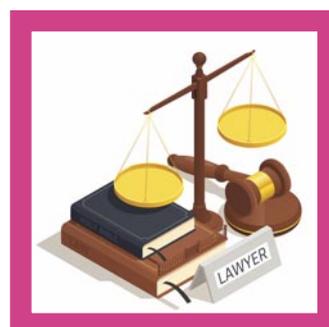
- Peaky Blinders
- Ozark
- Call the Midwife
- Modern Family
- Brooklyn 99
- Deadpool



With so many shows being added to Netflix all the time, many with audio description be sure to keep checking in and search for the newly added shows. **Happy watching!**

Disability Legal Information Clinic – now online!

Accessing legal advice can be costly and time consuming. Services such as the The Disability Legal Information Clinic, which is run by the Centre for Disability Law and Policy (CDLP) in NUI Galway, can be of great benefit to many people.



The clinic has two main goals:

- To provide legal information services on issues related to disability, and
- To serve as a research resource for

practitioners and organisations on aspects of disability law.

The clinic provides free, accessible, confidential legal information on disability related legal issues. These services are available right across Ireland for people with a disability, their families, and supporters. The clinic is staffed by law student volunteers who are supervised by a member of the CDLP team and a qualified legal practitioner. In the past the clinic has dealt with issues in relation to housing, education, employment, discrimination, and access to supports or services. The clinic will be completely online for the 2020/2021 academic year.

To find out more about the clinic's work visit www.nuigalway.ie/centre-disability-law-policy/dlic/.

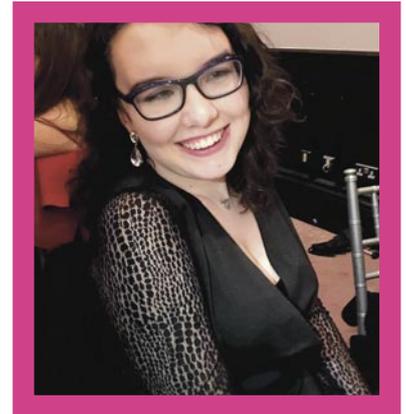
You can also email dlic@nuigalway.ie if you have any questions or would like to arrange an appointment.

Marianna Watchorn's Guide to settling into college life

I have recently graduated from Trinity College Dublin studying Irish and Philosophy. As a two subject module student I spent most of my days going between different lecture rooms, all of which changed regularly. On some occasions I found it hard to read the lecture room numbers which did cause me some stress. Braille and/or raised numbering on the rooms would have been helpful.

I found the Irish Department very supportive of my needs, providing me with enlarged lecture

notes and documents as required. I suggest you contact the disability support staff in the college before the start of term to discuss your needs and orientate yourself to the college environment.



Marianna Watchorn.

I really enjoyed my time in college. I met lots of new people and learned more about myself. As time went by, I became more confident. There were a few things I tried to help me to become more comfortable and involved in college life.

On the first week of college (Fresher's Week) I went about all the different stands and chose different societies, sports teams and activities I wanted to join for the year. I decided to try trampolining, joining a knitting society and rowing society. This is such a great way to make many different friends, so my advice is to check out some activities and see which ones are your favourites. I even became Secretary of the Knitting Society and college representative for my Irish group!

Another thing I found very helpful were the class group chats and group coffees we had with our Irish class. This was great to meet people outside a classroom environment and a fun way to spend those hour-long breaks. Maybe you could suggest a coffee group for your class if there isn't one. I really enjoyed this aspect of my college experience, whether going to rowing, trampolining training sessions or trips, the college ball, or meeting up with other societies within college.

So, get involved in college life ... you won't regret it!

Chatting with Hugh O'Brien from Cavan

Hugh O'Brien (80) retired from secondary school teaching in 2005 with plenty of plans to enjoy his retirement, however, these altered significantly as his sight deteriorated. Although his sight loss was gradual, Hugh now has no sight in his right eye and no central vision in his left eye so he relies on his peripheral vision in his left eye but that isn't reliable.

He admits his vision is so poor now that he can't read books or watch TV and finds it very hard to put toothpaste on a toothbrush. He can only really see shapes now. But he is coping well and uses a white cane to get around the town which he knows so well.

Emotional support service

He credits NCBI for ensuring he stays independent by teaching him mobility skills and relying on his cane when he is out and about. In the early days of adjusting to his sight loss, Hugh and his late wife availed of the emotional support service which he found very beneficial. NCBI also encouraged him to learn computer skills and touch typing and despite being initially fearful and reluctant he admits he'd be lost without these skills now.

As Hugh said: "My fear and hesitancy to embrace technology was really diluted knowing I had access to the NCBI team to guide me through each step without overwhelming me with terminology or information".

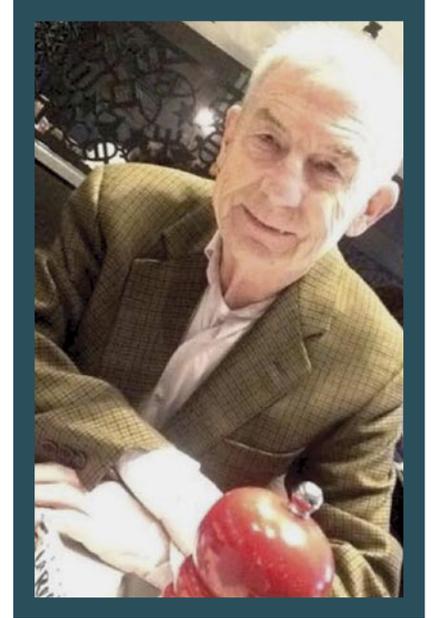
His proficiency with computers and his keen interest in local history, has led him to write two booklets: 'The History of Cinema in Cootehill' and

"The Sinn Fein By-election 1918'. Both publications have been printed and distributed.

He's also a keen actor and last year starred in a film '*Redemption of a Rogue*', which won at the Galway Film Fleadh. He describes how his sight loss didn't affect his ability to perform the role as his scenes were shot in a car or a bedroom, negating the need for him to be too mobile.

During COVID-19, his ability to use the computer and other devices such as Alexa and his smart phone has ensured he stayed connected with family and friends, particularly his family. While cocooning didn't pose a real challenge for him, his inability to travel has been really hampered specially to visit his daughter in London.

"For me, Alexa is the most obedient woman I've ever known! I can access my music, news and other information. I use my phone for audio books as well as phone calls."



Hugh O'Brien.

Denis O'Brien Supports World Sight Day

(Article from David Byrne, in Kerry's Eye published 22nd October 2020)

BEING able to recognise friends on the street, through to mundane daily tasks like driving to the shop, are all things Killarney man Denis O'Brien (71) took for granted — until his vision was taken from him.

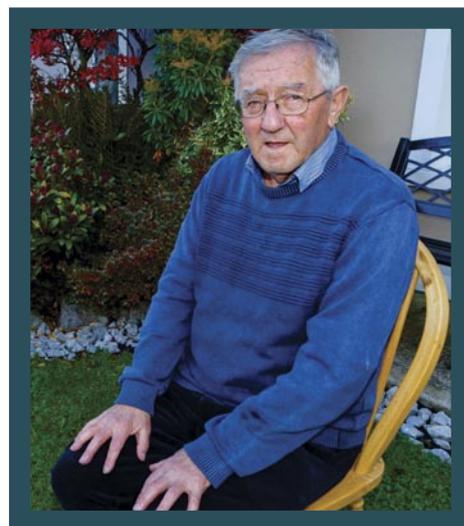
Speaking to Kerry's Eye to mark World Sight Day, an annual day of awareness on blindness and vision impairment, Mr O'Brien said good general health is vital and it is important to check eye health before it's too late.

Having been diagnosed with glaucoma, and despite seeing an eye specialist, going for cataract operations, laser treatment and getting injections into his eyes, Denis' eyesight quickly deteriorated 10 years ago.

"Every day is a challenge, I'm totally blind in one eye," he said. "I've a small bit of vision in the other. People would salute me and it wouldn't be until they are gone down the road a small bit until I realise who they are. And if I went into a room, I'd have to focus the room so that I wouldn't fall over — but once I focus in, I wouldn't be too bad."

Denis neglected his health which resulted in Diabetic Retinopathy and resulting vision loss. "If I had my life to live again... It is great to be wise now," he said. "But I am managing it well. If I was leaving my house — I go for a walk everyday — I'd have to plan my walk before I leave the house."

He hasn't been able to drive for many years but Denis says he is very independent and makes the most of his life despite his reduced vision.



Denis O'Brien.

Denis lives on his own and has home help but said life with very poor eyesight has been made easier thanks to the close-knit community in Killarney.

"They all know my condition and if they are going to town they'd shoot in the door and ask me do I need something. But I'm a very independent person and if I was looking for something from the shop I'd rather walk myself — while I still can, I'd prefer to do it for myself."

Denis worked with Liebherr and Kerry County Council in Killarney for many years before being forced to retire due to ill health and poor eyesight. Mr O'Brien has availed of the services of NCBI Tralee branch for the past 17 years. He has urged people suffering from vision loss not to be embarrassed to seek help.

"The staff in NCBI Tralee do Trojan work — they are brilliant," he said. "They are nearly part of my family — they are so good to me."

A total of 481 people use NCBI services in Kerry but it is anticipated that there are numerous more people with vision loss throughout the county.

Living Through COVID-19

“For me COVID-19 has been like being in jail, unable to get out and about. I feel trapped and isolated and it’s unsafe to go outside as I need my sense of touch to get around. While I am a white cane user, it is no good for me with the uneven surfaces on the country roads around me.” — **(Kay, 74 years, Wexford)**

“I missed NCBI Camp Abilities as it was cancelled due to COVID-19. It is always great fun, opportunity to try new things like kayaking, learn new skills and meet other young people who are vision impaired”. — **(Kieran, 16 years, Dublin)**

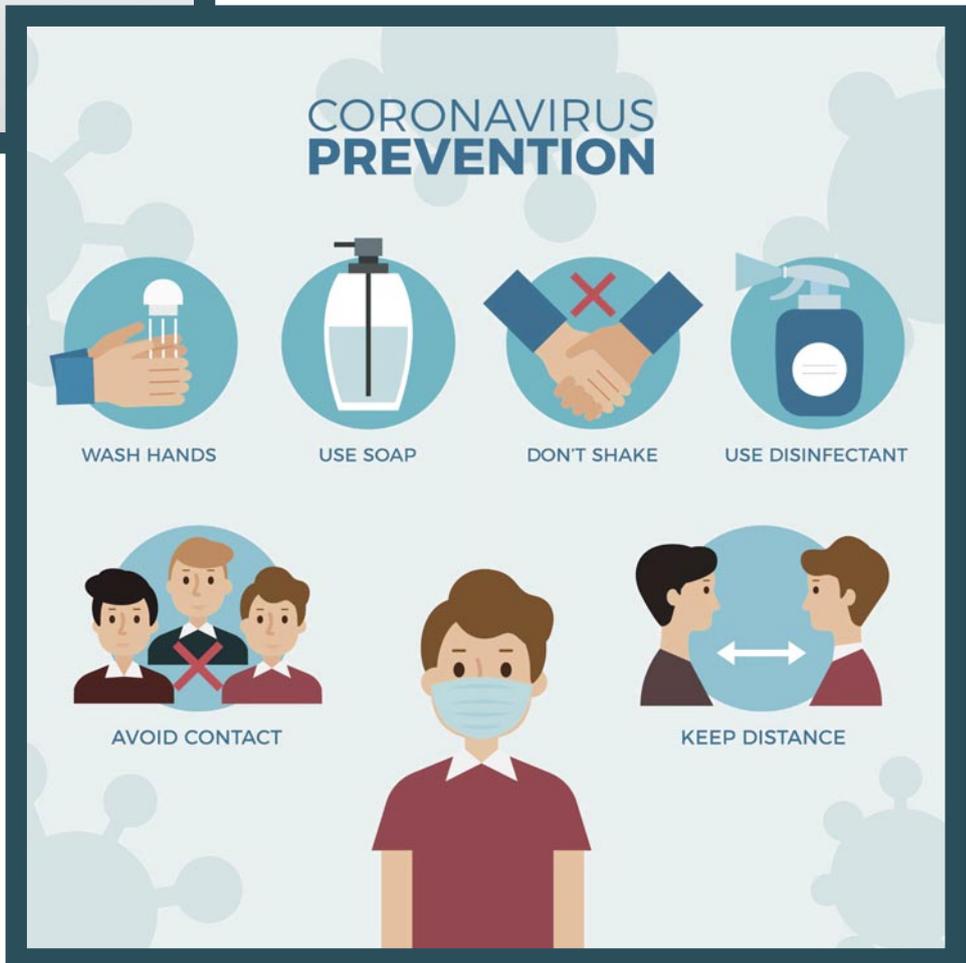
“COVID-19 has really affected me getting out and about. I feel very isolated and alone and still largely cocooning because of additional health issues. I’ve been receiving the Meals on Wheels service from NCBI since March and it’s been a lifeline as I’m not very mobile so find it hard to get around the kitchen so would only be eating snacks instead of a decent meal.”
— **(Sally, 85 years, Dublin)**

“I find it really hard to see the new signage, start of the queue or gauge whether I am 2m apart from people. Most people have been really kind to directing me but no one considers that abiding by social distancing is impossible for us.”
— **(Sinead, 38 years, Tipperary)**

“I found home-schooling my children difficult as I didn’t want their education to suffer but being blind I couldn’t see their school work. Their teacher was as helpful as possible but it was hard.”
— **(Andrew, 37 years, Monaghan)**



Lockdown has been a difficult time for our service users. Here are some of their thoughts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our Services still support them through this period of isolation.



“Technology has been a lifesaver for me through COVID-19. I’ve been able to stay connected with family and friends as well as be entertained through audio books and audio described movies. Otherwise the days would have been really long”.
— (Paul, 63 years, Mayo)

“I was really concerned about whether my AMD injections would go ahead during lockdown and whether my remaining sight would deteriorate further if I didn’t have my regular injections”.
— (Anne, 65 years, Sligo)

Exciting and Innovative Transition

In September 2020 NCBI's Children and Young Person's Team launched a 9-month pilot project involving a weekly workshop for 6 students in Transition Year (TY). Edel Doherty and Fiona Hogg are the project leads and we caught up with them, participants and others involved recently to get an insight into this programme.

Edel, can you describe the project?

This is a programme dedicated to the preparation of students with visual impairment for a successful transition from school to further education, training, or employment.



Edel Doherty.

Fiona, how did the idea for the TY project come about?

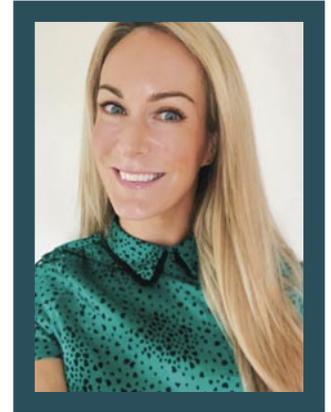
NCBI identified a common thread, from feedback from students looking for increased support with transition to further education and the workforce. NCBI believed that these skills could be implemented into a TY programme in order to meet the needs earlier and help students become proactive in their future planning.

Fiona, how are the students accessing the training?

Via Zoom either at home or at school using iPads, laptops and phones!

Edel, what do you hope to achieve with this project?

For the students to have a better understanding of their strengths and skills, career guidance and subject choices for senior cycle. To connect with others with sight loss, confidently communicate



Fiona Hogg.

information about their vision

and advocate for themselves for supports needed in school, college and beyond.

Edel, Clare Kennelly of Inclusive World Training was brought on board as a collaborator, how did that come about?

We recognised that we could deliver on most of the elements of the programme such as self-advocacy, assistive technology use, peer support, independent travel etc. but we needed access to meaningful work placements and links to industry.

Clare what is your specific role?

I am a trainer and my company is providing the work experience for the project. I am vision impaired and have successfully navigated education and the workplace so I am a peer adult role model. Virtual industry elements will include an insight into different departments of an organisation, roles and careers, hearing from employees, technology use, digital challenges etc.

Clare what are the benefits of using Zoom as a co-facilitator and vision impaired user?

It has some great features like breakout rooms, chat room and polling. The students are learning how to use the Zoom platform effectively, such as sharing a screen and running an inclusive event.

Year project

Ella, you are a TY student, why did you decide to take part in this project?

In school the focus on careers is for "normal or able bodied people" so you are left in a limbo as you know the employment rate is lower even though you have the same skill set as an able bodied person.

Shane as a participant have you learned anything so far?

One of the main things I have learned is how to creatively solve problems.

Tadgh, what do you hope to have achieved for yourself at the end of the project?

I hope to be able to teach not only my friends and family about how to accommodate people with disabilities but also people in business and have an understanding of what jobs suit me by looking at my skills.

Edel, how much support is needed from parents and schools?

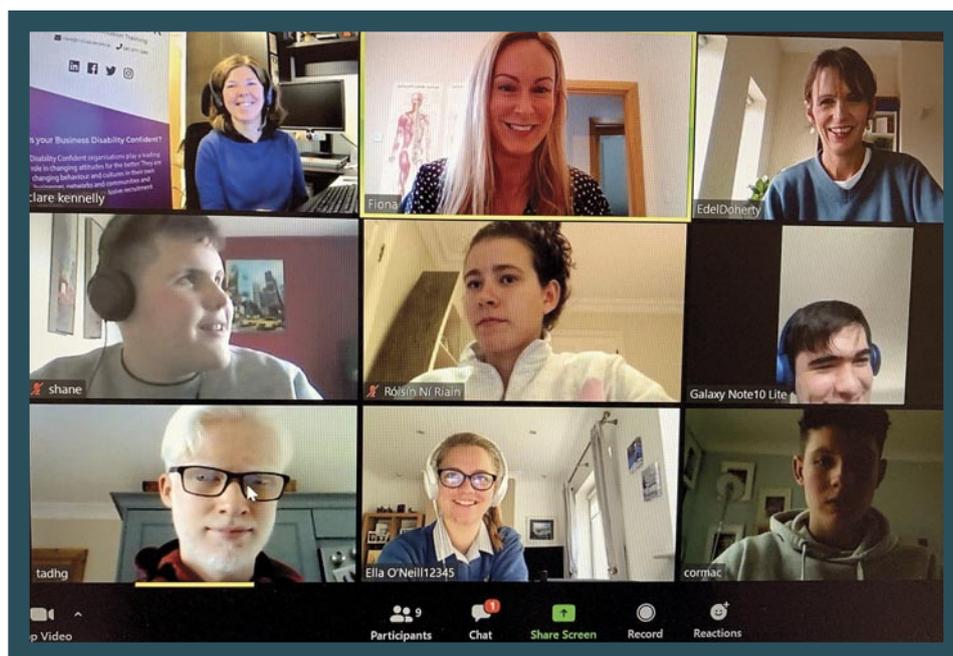
Buy-in from parents is crucial and all schools approached have been extremely supportive and enthusiastic.

Fiona, will this project have any wider benefits or influence?

Yes, I think the content within the workshops could be used for all second level students and could be tailored for 3rd level students also.

So you are only a few weeks in yet; but how is it going, any highlights?

Clare: Each facilitator brings something different



Students taking part in the Transition Year ZOOM Training and advice session for the project.

to the project. It's actually great fun! The highlights are Fiona's ice-breakers and fun games that we end with each week. Where does she get the ideas!

Fiona: It's amazing to see how supportive and open the students are with each other and seeing how a peer network is already becoming visible!

Edel: Students are connecting with others from all parts of the country and sharing their TY journey together.

Finally, what will success look like at the end of the project?

Edel: Positive feedback from students, parents, and schools, continued roll out and expansion of the project for 2021.

Clare: Creating an inclusive environment online where everyone shows up each week. A supportive atmosphere where all students are participating to the best of their abilities, working as a team and learning while having fun.

Fiona: A supportive peer group/network of students with the skillset to feel disability confident in their future planning post Leaving Cert and beyond.

Peter Ryan – Fine Gael Council

Twenty-nine year old Peter from Tipperary was left legally blind after contracting a condition called Leber Hereditary Optic Neuropathy about ten years ago which affects his central vision. Over the space of 14 months, he lost 90% of his vision and his life as he knew it changed forever.

"I was a 19-year-old, living a simple life, working in construction, very sporty even from a young age, but when I started making mistakes on the hurling field I thought I might need contact lenses and it snowballed from there. It was a total shock to me. I began grieving the life I had been living before the diagnosis as everything was different now. Sometimes I thought it would have been better if I had been hit on the head by a hurl and lost my sight in one day because losing it over 14 months was very frustrating. I was losing my sight bit by bit, retraining myself to do one thing and then a month later my sight would have deteriorated further meaning I had to find another way of doing the same task with less sight."

A lot of Counselling

Peter compares it to complete mental torture, but there are upsides to this story too.

"There is a lot of hurt that goes with losing your sight, and I did a lot of counselling and talking about it. You need to allow time to stop and process it as putting up a front for your family and the people around you doesn't help. Then you reach a point where you have to move on with your new life."

Peter explains how he was hesitant at the

beginning to use the services of NCBI, feeling he could not relate to the words that are used to describe people with sight loss. "I was a cool young 19-year-old, without a care in the world and words like blind, visually impaired and disability freaked me out. I didn't identify with any of that."

Sense of Community

His family pushed him to reach out to NCBI, and he felt the sense of community that he found when walking through the doors of NCBI helped especially with the isolation he was feeling.

"From technology to someone being at the end of the phone for you is really what encapsulates the service you receive, to have someone there. It doesn't have to be heavy things but to have someone there to laugh with who gets it is both reassuring and refreshing."

Getting into Politics

Peter's life has taken many unexpected turns since losing his sight. He was elected in May 2019 to Tipperary County Council, his interest in getting involved in politics came about after reinventing himself while coming to terms with his diagnosis.

"I had been doing a lot of socially conscious things within my community over the last few years, whether that was raising funds for a charity or going to a local school to talk about resilience. People could see that I was doing some good in the community, and I had built up a cache within the area. When I was approached initially about running for Councillor, I didn't think I would be interested but when I

lor and Paralympic Cyclist

broke down what the job entails, essentially you are advocating for people."

Paralympic cyclist

In addition to being a politician, Peter is also a Paralympic cyclist. When deciding to get into politics, the question of how this would affect Tokyo Paralympics 2020 was raised by his nearest and dearest.

"I have always lived by the determination of "if you want something enough, you will do it" and definitely, it was trying at times. It was a whole new work-life balance for me trying to be an excellent cyclist and a really good Councillor for my constituents. Still, I am so glad I did it because I look at some of my teammates now and given the Paralympics are postponed due to the Covid19 pandemic they do nothing else and they are struggling. I never wanted to be just a cyclist I wanted more, and I am a big believer in the work-life balance."

Peter got involved in cycling back in 2013 at an open day held for those with sight loss in UCD, on a quest to return to sport as it played such a pivotal part in his life prior to sight loss. A newly formed club back in Tipperary were keen to have him involved, and the rest is history. He explains how he never thought that it would lead to the Paralympics but is grateful it has. After just six months of cycling, Peter was winning national titles and then he was called up on to the Irish squad, opening a whole world of opportunities.

The global pandemic has halted these opportunities for the moment with the Tokyo



Peter Ryan.

Paralympics postponed until 2021. During lockdown maintaining momentum to train alone was difficult and when restrictions eased it was vital to reconnect with his tandem partner for regular training sessions. Now with restrictions being reimposed, it affects the training regime again and makes it difficult to keep spirits high among his teammates especially as no races are in coming up. However, Peter is still committed to performing his best in Tokyo in 2021.

Positive mental health

Peter continues to regularly give talks to school pupils about resilience and positive mental health. His core message is that "losing your sight does not mean your life is over. We become prisoners of our own heads. We all have this blueprint of the way we think things will be but realistically not everything that happened to me is for the worst. If I am having one of my more profound moments I think I am living a better life, I have learned things about myself and life, and I am doing things that I am sure I would have never have done, and there is something cool in that."

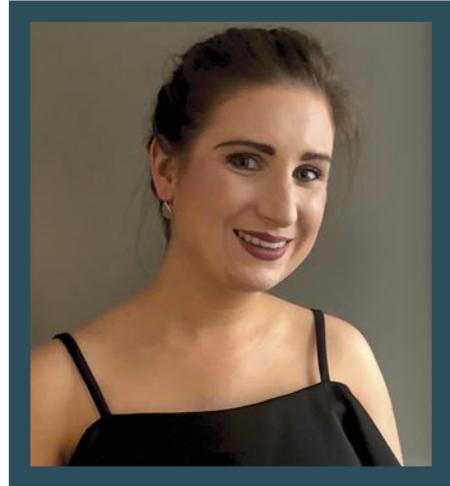
Value of BookShare to 3rd Level Students

Name: Aoife Price
University: NUI Galway
Course: Structured PhD in Disability Law and Policy

I am excited to be starting into the second year of my PhD. I am a PhD student on the MARIE SKŁODOWSKA-CURIE ACTIONS Research Fellowship Programme. I am one of a group of PhD students all over Europe that are working on the Disability Advocacy and Research in Europe (DARE) project.

I was diagnosed with dyslexia at a young age and struggled throughout my school years. I wasn't aware of any assistive technology to support me in my studies and my parents went to great efforts to ensure that I could succeed. My parents even recorded all my school books via a Dictaphone for both my Junior and Leaving certificate!

When I moved onto third level, I registered with the disability office and became aware of assistive technology and how it could support me in my studies. It really changed my approach to how I studied and has helped me so much. I am currently a student in NUI Galway and shortly after I registered with the disability office there the Assistive Technology Officer made me aware of BookShare. It has completely changed and revolutionised my learning experience. Nearly every book I search is in the library and I then download it into a word format and use Read&Write (screen reading software) to read it to me. Not having a time limit on the books is helpful too as it is something that you can save and go back to. I also sometimes print off the books as I work well by listening and reading



Aoife Price.

and highlighting at the same time.

I would encourage students with dyslexia to register for the BookShare service and I thank NCBI for making it available to people with dyslexia.

Name: Jessica McNamee
University: National College Ireland
Course: BA(hons) Degree in Early Childhood Education

This September I returned to complete my BA(hons) Degree in Early Childhood Education, in The National College of Ireland.

I am dyslexic and I recently began accessing NCBI Bookshare. At first, I was really unsure if this way of reading would suit me.

But once I logged into Bookshare, I could see the limitless supply of research for my own personal growth as well as my educational



Jessica McNamee.

growth. I listen and read my books daily now. I find it super easy to download the book I need onto my mobile or laptop. I can bookmark any information I find important, to refer back to again. I can personalise and change settings to suit my personal way of learning such a slowing down audio, changing font or colour which is a major help for me.

I am really enjoying having both visual and audio when reading. NCBI has helped me have joy in reading again. It is giving me back my confidence in my reading, being able to hear the words while reading it helps me understand sounds and words helping me gain confidence while gaining important knowledge or information.

I have been using Bookshare since June 2020 to familiarise myself with it and it has proved invaluable to me since then. Being able to have all my books in one place will help me create personalised notes to stay on top of my learning and help me achieve an even better grade in May 2021.

Focus on the Future — Employment Seminar



NCBI's National Employment Team recently hosted a virtual event called “Focus on the Future — Employment Seminar”.

Over 70 people registered for the event, which was hosted online using Microsoft Teams. The event spanned Tuesday to Thursday 10th -12th November with sessions running for 1.5 hours each day.

Day One provided participants with an opportunity to hear from three service users who have successfully navigated the employment landscape:

Clare Kennelly: a disability business inclusion specialist; **Paul Tuohy** who has worked for the revenue commissioners since 2002 and

Breandan Ward, who worked in investment banking for 15 years in London and New York and now works as a lecturer, coach and consultant.

Continued on page 16.

Continued from page 15.

Day Two looked at supports around education and employment with four speakers: **Dermot Crosby**, a Disability Case Officer with the Department of Social Protection; **Dermot O’Gorman**, a Job Coach with Employability Limerick; **Michelle O’Halloran**, a Disability Advisor with the Disability Support Service at UCC and **Orla Reddy**, a Guidance Counsellor and Co-Ordinator with Kilkenny Adult Guidance Service.

Day Three brought together four speakers from within NCBI Services: **Neil Ashworth, Cara Gibbon, Jodie McGrielle and Denis Nolan**. The final day looked at the supports, training, tools and pathways available to people living with sight loss who are looking to find or retain employment.

We had some great feedback from the event, which was well received each day:
“I’m really enjoying the event so far. It is so well presented and well run. I just wish they were available years ago when I was looking for work. Well done everybody”.

“The event is great, really helpful. Will recordings of the presentation be available?”

The event was the first of what is hoped will become an annual employment seminar and provides a useful platform to launch NCBI's employment strategy for 2021 and beyond.

For further information on the event and/or any employment-related questions contact: employment@ncbi.ie



Visionary Choir Calls Out to All Ireland

The Visionary Choir is a group of blind and vision impaired singers who are continuing to rehearse using Zoom. In pre-Covid times the choir met in Dublin on Saturday mornings, and was limited to those able to access Ely Place, now there is an opportunity for a country wide participation using Zoom. Already new members from Belfast, and Kilkenny have joined.

We meet from 10.30 until 12.30 to sing and chat and there are audio learning files available to get familiar with words and melody, so there is

no requirement to be able to read music. We sing a mixture of genres, popular, jazz, sacred, film themes etc., with male and female voice harmonies. The fee is 60 euro for a 10 week term, or pro rata depending on what stage of the term you join.

For further details please email Deirdre Deverell at deirdre.deverell@gmail.com .

Death of Jimmy Gallagher, friend and Vision Sports pioneer

Sadly Jimmy Gallagher, a pioneer of organised sport for blind and vision impaired people, died in November.



Jimmy Gallagher and former Vision Sports Chairman Robbie Dobbyn.

A life-long sports enthusiast, Jimmy was Ireland's first blind marathon and ultra-runner and completed 36 marathons around the world including all the early Dublin events. He also actively participated in skiing and tandem cycling.

Jimmy was heavily involved in the development of nationally organised sport for vision impaired people in Ireland since its inception in 1978. He was a regular attendee at Vision Sports events including MayFest. He credited his many friends, tandem pilots and guides for their support and really appreciated getting his Braille MayFest programme. Most recently, he was a popular attendee at the NCBI's Iona Resource Centre.

In 2014, Jimmy Gallagher became the first athlete to be inducted into the Vision Sports Ireland Hall of Fame. His memory will live on through Vision Sports work.

Noreen Lynch RIP



Noreen Lynch and her husband John.

We were sad to learn about the recent death of Noreen Lynch, Listowel, Co. Kerry. Noreen had been an invaluable volunteer with the North Kerry branch of NCBI for over 30 years. She was part of the committee that helped fundraise and support and develop services for people who are blind or vision impaired in North Kerry. Noreen had a very positive outlook, always with a smile on her face and a listening ear. She was a great communicator and chatted and engaged with service users about various topics of interest. She helped support monthly outings and annual holidays for service users in North Kerry.

Noreen was well known and respected in her local community. She enjoyed going for daily walks and always stopped and chatted with those that she met along the way.

She was always available to offer support to staff and service users. She will be sadly missed by service users and staff.

To her husband John and children we extend our deepest sympathy.

May she rest in peace.

A red poster with white text and snowflake graphics. The text reads: "You're invited to our virtual CHRISTMAS CONCERT FRIDAY 11TH DECEMBER • 8PM - 10PM". Below this, it says: "Please join us for a special evening of celebration and thanks. It's been a tough year but still let us find time for Christmas cheer—and for a chat with some of the people who have been trailblazing in spite of their visual impairment." At the bottom, it says: "Check our website www.ncbi.ie for links to the show on the night." and "Also streamed on Facebook and YouTube!".

You're invited to our virtual
CHRISTMAS CONCERT
FRIDAY 11TH DECEMBER • 8PM - 10PM

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It's been a tough year but still let us find time for Christmas
cheer—and for a chat with some of the people who have been
trailblazing in spite of their visual impairment.

Check our website www.ncbi.ie for links to the show on the night.

Also streamed on Facebook and YouTube!

Virtual Christmas Concert

The NCBI Virtual Christmas Concert will air on Friday 11th December at 8pm.

For the first time, NCBI is to present an online Christmas concert which will be streamed on Facebook and YouTube.

The concert, organised by the Foundation team, is a coming together of the people and stories of 2020, to say thanks to our wonderful supporters and to catch up on some of the developments of the year.

It's been a really challenging year for so many but all the more reason to connect at Christmas to make the most of what we have.

For a mention on the night please email foundation@ncbi.ie with your wishes and don't forget to tune in.

Eye Health Information Videos



With support from Novartis Ireland, a series of eye health information videos are now being produced and will be made available online.

The series will help people learn more about how NCBI can respond and support children and adults living with a visual impairment arising from different eye conditions as well as the treatments and other supports available to them.

Originally planned as a patient information roadshow, the programme had to be rethought and will now be delivered as this video series featuring expert speakers and other supports. The first of the series will be available from December 2020.

Dundalk Shop Opening

NCBI's latest store opened in Dundalk in October with the help of local resident Senator John McGahon.

This store similar to its other new shops boasts a fresh new look with all aspects of the shop fitout made from reusable and recyclable raw materials. The shop will sell quality preloved clothing, accessories, and hidden gems. Pop in and see for yourself. All donations gratefully received.



Pictured at NCBI Retail shop Dundalk, are, NCBI staff together with CEO Chris White (left) and Senator John McGahon celebrate Dundalk shop opening.



NCBI on Grafton Street for Christmas

NCBI is thrilled to set up the first ever charity Pop-up Shop on Grafton Street in Dublin, having secured for free, access to 110 Grafton Street for the month of December. Being positioned on Grafton Street ahead of Christmas provides a unique opportunity to launch our **Re:Newed** for NCBI brand specific for Grafton Street, showcase the breadth of our high-quality designer stock (donated from Irish designers, celebrities and public) and challenge customer perceptions of pre-worn and vintage clothes, in true sustainable spirit.

NCBI commitment to sustainable fashion and greener environmental practices will also be evident in the use of reusable and recyclable raw



materials in the shop fitout many of which have been generously given to us by sponsors. This will be no ordinary charity shop as Re:Newed for NCBI was inspired by the London version that Harrod's have developed, which was curated by Stella McCartney and runs every year for the month of March with NSPCC. Selfridges are now also running a pop-up shop in conjunction with Oxfam.

The shop will be open from December 2nd-31st. It is a great way to end 2020 which has been difficult for NCBI retail given the temporary closures during the year due to COVID-19.

Have yourself a sustainable little Christmas

Is it the end of the line when it comes to throw-away clothes? This Christmas why not try to shop local, shop second-hand and support the work of NCBI while doing your bit for climate change control.

Rosie Henson, NCBI Head of Retail discusses how charity shops are changing the world one second-hand blouse at a time this Christmas. Fashion experts have recently noted a significant shift in our approach to buying and sourcing our wardrobe second-hand. No longer simply driven by thrift, a new breed of fashion-conscious but ethical consumers has begun to emerge.

A consequence of turning our backs on fast fashion and its detrimental environmental impact, pre-loved hubs like eBay, Etsy, clothes swaps, as well as charity shops are flying the flag as unlikely change-makers in the rush to protect the planet.

Impact of Fast Fashion

As Rosie explains "We are operating in a background where the volume of clothes bought in the EU per person has increased by 40% in just a few decades, driven by a fall in prices and the increased speed with which fashion is delivered to consumers. This has had a detrimental impact on the environment, most particularly in third world countries, as most production of the clothes we wear every day is made there. The production of raw materials, spinning them into fibres, weaving fabrics, and dyeing require enormous amounts of water and chemicals, including pesticides for growing raw materials such as cotton."

Our environmental impact

1,850 tonnes of clothing & shoes were donated to NCBI in 2019



By reusing and keeping clothing in circulation we saved

10 billion litres of water

But she explains that closer to home, the environmental impact is also felt. "Think about all the water, energy and chemicals used in washing, tumble drying and ironing, as well as the microplastics shed into the environment. Fast fashion brands favour using lower quality resources which results in less than half of used clothes being reused or recycled after one or two wears when they are no longer needed."

Changemakers

Things are slowly improving — but that change is painfully slow as Rosie continues:

"On a European and global scale there are now various ways to address these issues, including developing new business models for clothing rental and designing products in a way that would make reuse and recycling easier (circular fashion) and encouraging consumers to buy fewer clothes of better quality (slow fashion)".

All this may seem out of the control of the



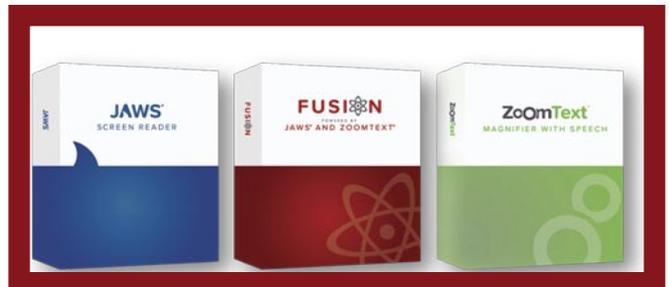
ordinary buyer. But playing your part is easier than you think. Rosie is encouraging everyone to buy second-hand this Christmas.

"We want you to know that by buying just one shirt from our stores, you are saving more emissions than driving a car for 35 miles. Every year, nearly 2,000 tonnes of clothes are donated to NCBI. By reusing and keeping clothing in circulation, we can save 10 billion litres of water. Statistics like this, you cannot ignore. You can not only find some amazing unique pieces in our shops nationwide at affordable prices but you're also be making a difference".

Charity Retail is at the heart of changing how we think about fashion and how we think about recycling. Rosie says the benefit is twofold. "We want to inform and influence how people think about shopping, fast fashion and throw away culture while also knowing that profits made provide essential services for those who are blind and vision impaired in Ireland."

This Christmas, why not pop into one of our 114 shops across the country? You may be surprised as to what you might find. Small individual changes do help to change the world for the better. Our future generations will thank you for it.

What's New in JAWS, Fusion and ZoomText 2021?



Here is a summary of new features and enhancements included in the latest releases of JAWS, Fusion and ZoomText from Freedom Scientific.

Picture Smart Improvements in JAWS and Fusion

Introduced in JAWS and Fusion 2019, Picture Smart allows you to choose a photo and submit it to be analysed. A description of the image is then displayed in the Results Viewer. To use Picture Smart, press INSERT+SPACEBAR, followed by P to activate the Picture Smart layer.

JAWS and Fusion 2021 continues to expand this feature by offering several improvements including:

- Describing images on web pages. If focused on an image that is part of a web page, such as a photo on Facebook, pressing INSERT+SPACEBAR, P followed by C now describes the photo.
- Submitting images to multiple services to help improve accuracy: By default, images are submitted to Microsoft for analysing. However, the Results Viewer now contains a More Results link which submits the image again to additional services for analysing and displays an updated description.

You can also add SHIFT to a Picture Smart command to use multiple services. For example, INSERT+SPACEBAR, P followed by SHIFT+F, SHIFT+C, or SHIFT+B.

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OCR Text Directly into a Word Document in JAWS and Fusion

The Convenient OCR (Optical Character Recognition) feature has been enhanced to support sending recognized text directly to Word. Convenient OCR enables you to access images containing text that is part of the image and displays this information in the Results Viewer. This includes onscreen images such as the graphical setup screen for an application, an inaccessible PDF opened in Adobe Reader, a currently selected image file in Windows Explorer, or a document acquired by a flatbed scanner.

New Voice Assistant in JAWS, Fusion, and ZoomText

A new Voice Assistant provides a way to interact with JAWS, ZoomText, and Fusion in Windows 10 using speech input. Ask it to help you out with various JAWS or ZoomText features using natural speech. This means that the same action can be performed by more than one similar phrase instead of a single predefined voice command. For instance, to launch JAWS Settings Centre, you could say "Settings Centre" or "change settings". Unlike keyboard shortcuts, which can be hard to remember, natural voice commands are an easier way to interact with the JAWS or ZoomText software. Using voice input to control JAWS or ZoomText can also benefit users with certain conditions which prevent them from using a keyboard effectively.

The JAWS Voice Assistant uses your computer's internal microphone, or you can talk to it using an external microphone or headset. To tell the Voice Assistant to begin listening for a specific command, there are three options:

- Press the key combination,
- INSERT+ALT+SPACEBAR, (CAPS LOCK+ALT+SPACEBAR for ZoomText and Fusion).
- Note the wake word for JAWS is "Sharky" and for ZoomText and Fusion is "Zoomy".

Has JAWS out dotted Braille?

By Brian Manning.

There has been some debate in recent years as to whether Braille will eventually be



replaced by new technology such as screen and print reading devices, which convert text into spoken words. We caught up with IT Trainer Brian Manning who highlights that technology is here to enhance the Braille reading experience, and not replace it.

While screen reading and other assistive technology solutions have hugely impacted on almost every aspect of the lives of blind and vision impaired people, the simple reality is that we as a community do very much need the teaching of and proliferation of Braille.

Children who are born blind, for example still very much need to be taught literacy and numeracy and the best medium for this learning is very definitely Braille. People with dual sensory loss require refreshable Braille as a basic tool of communication to promote their greater independence and for their inclusion in their communities and in their broader everyday lives.

Blind professionals find Braille invaluable when making presentations or delivering on reports or other professional findings. Blind graduates for example were encouraged to learn Braille by the UCC disability support office up to recently. Again there is a very strong argument made by Braille users that they prefer the tactile feel of a book they are reading over its electronic alternative; somewhat

similar to the same argument in the sighted community between a hard copy book over a Kindle.

The above are just some examples as to why Braille still very much has its place in a world totally consumed by assistive technology and it can be argued that Braille has now in fact embraced the aforementioned technology. I speak of course of the digital Braille note takers and braille displays which a lot of us are using to huge effect in our professional and personal lives. To say nothing of the dot watch.

So, in short, my contention is that both mediums Braille and assistive technology do not work to each other's exclusion, but conversely very much complement each other. I stand before you as the personification of someone that uses assistive technology and teaches it on a daily basis, but as anyone that knows me will attest, I am still quite dotty.

For more on this discussion, check out the NCBI podcast where June Tinsley interviews Brian Manning about how Braille complements advances in technology. It is available on Spotify, iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts.

Development of NCBI Smart Hub

In September this year, NCBI became an awardee of Rethink Ireland funding from the Social Innovation Fund to develop a new Smart Hub.

NCBI Labs is building the Smart Hub to allow disability information across multiple sources to be available through an App that will run on affordable smart devices such as the Amazon Echo and Google Home. Accurate and up to date information



will be created, curated, and managed to provide people with sight loss a single, simple source of information.

In addition to the consolidation of disability information, these Apps will enable easy access to all NCBI Services that are available virtually. The Smart App will allow full integration with NCBI's existing support services.

Kyran O'Mahoney, NCBI Chief Technology Officer has said "Winning the Rethink Ireland funding reinforces our belief that technology is a key enabler for people living with sight loss. This funding enables us to develop and deliver the NCBI Smart Hub which will utilise mainstream technology tailored to people who are blind or vision impaired. These types of inclusive platforms remove barriers and ensures equity of access to information and services for people with sight loss".

Further Information

You can listen to a podcast of Kyran O'Mahoney speaking about the Smart Hub on YouTube.

The Smart Hub is expected to be available to the public from September of next year. If you would like to be involved in the pilot and development of this project please **contact us at labs@ncbi.ie. We would really welcome your input and feedback.**



NCBI Labs

Working for People with Sight Loss

Invites anyone interested in how technology can help overcome barriers in daily life to participate in their Virtual Clubs.

- Each club has a NCBI Technology Trainer who is available to answer questions.
- When you join you will be given a Microsoft Teams link where you can join a meeting on your computer or smart device.
- Clubs are run virtually throughout the country.

**To join please
contact NCBI Labs
on labs@ncbi.ie**