



NCBI

Working for People
With Sight Loss

Iona Resource Centre

Engage

Enable

Empower

Meet Maggie



Maggie Richardson
the face behind
NCBI's day centres
in Dublin and
Wexford

inSight Contents

NCBI Policy and Advocacy

Pages 3 - 7

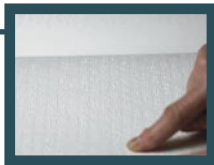
- New research on the experience of people living with AMD.
- Lockdown? Check-in and Chat about it.
- The challenge of social distancing with vision impairment.
- Join our movement for Change!
- Meet an Advocate.



NCBI Services

Pages 8 - 17

- Get your publication in a range of accessible formats from NCBI Library.
- NCBI Library: USB user, Irene Whitely.
- The 2020 Gerard Byrne Bursary Awards recipients.
- Connection Network — Antionette Burke, Limerick.
- Life with Vision Impairment.



NCBI News & Events

Page 11

- Check out new NCBI Website: - www.ncbi.ie.



NCBI People Profile

We feature Maggie Richardson, the face of NCBI's resource centres. Pages 12 - 14.



NCBI Fundraising

Pages 18 -19

- Tree of Light — Thank You!
- EYE Can weekly draw winners.
- Walking Champion raises funds for NCBI!
- Thank you, Robert Ward!
- RowFit virtual indoor rowing race 2020.



Try your luck and spread the word about NCBI's NEW 'eye can' Weekly Lottery. Great Prizes! — See Winners, page 18!



NCBI Retail

Pages 20 - 21

- Re:Newed Pop-up Shop for NCBI opened on Grafton Street.



NCBI Technology

Pages 21 - 24

- Virtual touch typing and virtual iPad with Voice-over courses.
- Alexa accessibility show and tell on the Echo Show.
- Emerging Tech — Interview with Javier Pita, CEO of NaviLens.



NCBI inSight

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New research on the experience of people living with wet AMD

Age Related Macular Degeneration (AMD) is the most common cause of vision impairment in Ireland among people over the age of 50. It results in the deterioration of the person's central vision.

Although treatment options are available to stop the progression of the condition, access to rehabilitation and community-based supports in a timely fashion also impact significantly on the person's livelihood and lifestyle.

Therefore, NCBI believes that meeting the persons mental and physical needs in as timely a manner as possible should also be a priority. This, however, has been a challenge for us to achieve. The Government needs to be more focused on adopting a more patient centric approach which ranges from diagnosis, treatment, and awareness of wet AMD as well as increased referrals to community-based supports and rehabilitation services such NCBI.

This is backed up by a new research report which has found that there is an urgent need to implement the development and implementation of clear timelines around the diagnosis,



treatment, and management of the condition, along with person's desire to be referred to NCBI's rehabilitation services. This approach would offer the person a real opportunity to maintain their care, independence, and the mental health needs. The findings of the new research will guide NCBI's continuous commitment to seek improvement in the outcomes and quality of care for people experiencing vision impairment.

In an aim to reduce the impact of wet AMD on peoples' health outcomes several recommendations are made in the research. It is recommended that firstly there needs to be timely access to rehabilitation.

Continued on page 4.

Continued from page 3.

This means that the State needs to:

- meaningfully invest in vision rehabilitation services for people living with wet AMD,
- include NCBI's rehabilitation service in the roll out of the HSE's proposals for the Primary Eye Care Teams,
- support increased access to community-based services by funding NCBI's Eye Clinic Liaison Officers and ensuring that this service can be rolled out across all major hospital ophthalmology clinics by the end of 2021.

Secondly, the research found that people's independence needs to be increased and isolation reduced by supporting people's mental health needs. NCBI is calling on the State to:

- support access to counselling services by funding a qualified counsellor post per Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO) area,
- move the point of care for wet AMD, out of hospitals and into care in the community and
- increase awareness and access to services by community-based resources within the HSE's Primary Eye Care Teams.

The findings also recommended supporting public awareness of AMD. This should be achieved by:

- improving awareness of AMD and the importance of regular eye checks, particularly for people over the age of 50 within the population in Ireland,
- developing guidelines to stipulate a time frame for diagnosis and treatment for use by healthcare professionals.

These guidelines should be in line with the UK NICE guidelines for late AMD which recommend:

1. One-day referral by healthcare professionals to a hospital-based macular service and
2. 14 days for treatment from referral date if 'wet active' AMD is confirmed.

You can find the full report and summary on the NCBI website at: www.ncbi.ie

This report was supported by Bayer.

If you have any further queries about this research and its recommendations, please contact the NCBI Policy and Advocacy Team on email:

campaigns@ncbi.ie or

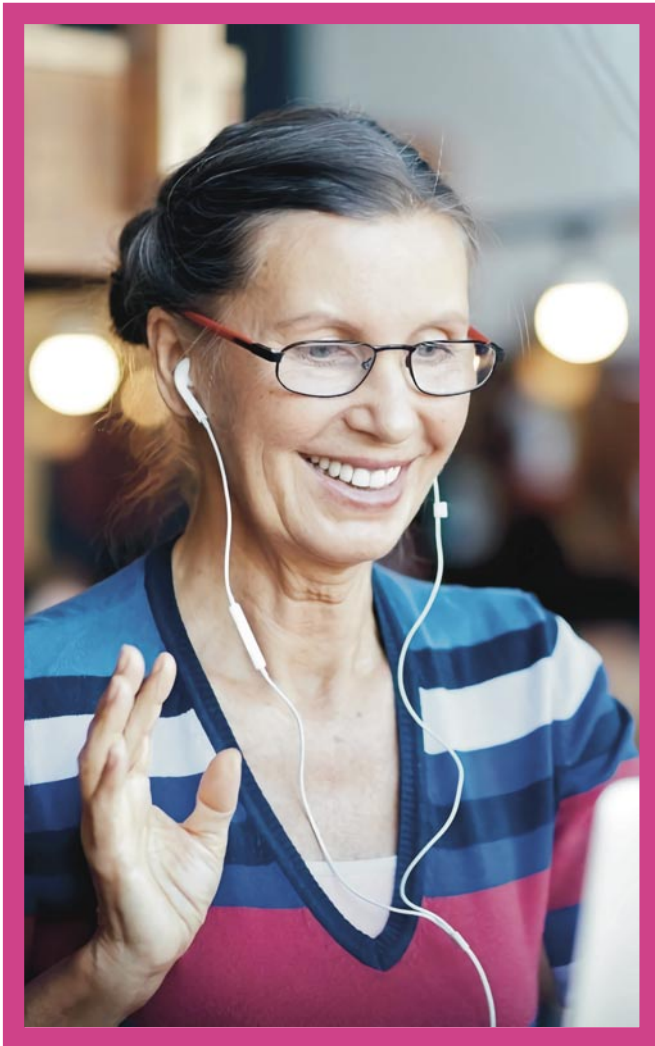
Tel: 01 8307033.

Cracking up in Lockdown? Check in and Chat about it!

Almost a year into the COVID-19 pandemic and in our third national lockdown, isolation levels among the blind and vision impaired community are as high as ever.

NCBI Check in and Chat groups were set up to help our service users to maintain human connections during this difficult time.

You can pop into the Check in and Chat zoom call every Thursday anytime from 11am to 1pm. It is a casual group where people who are blind or vision impaired can meet virtually with people who are in the same boat as them.

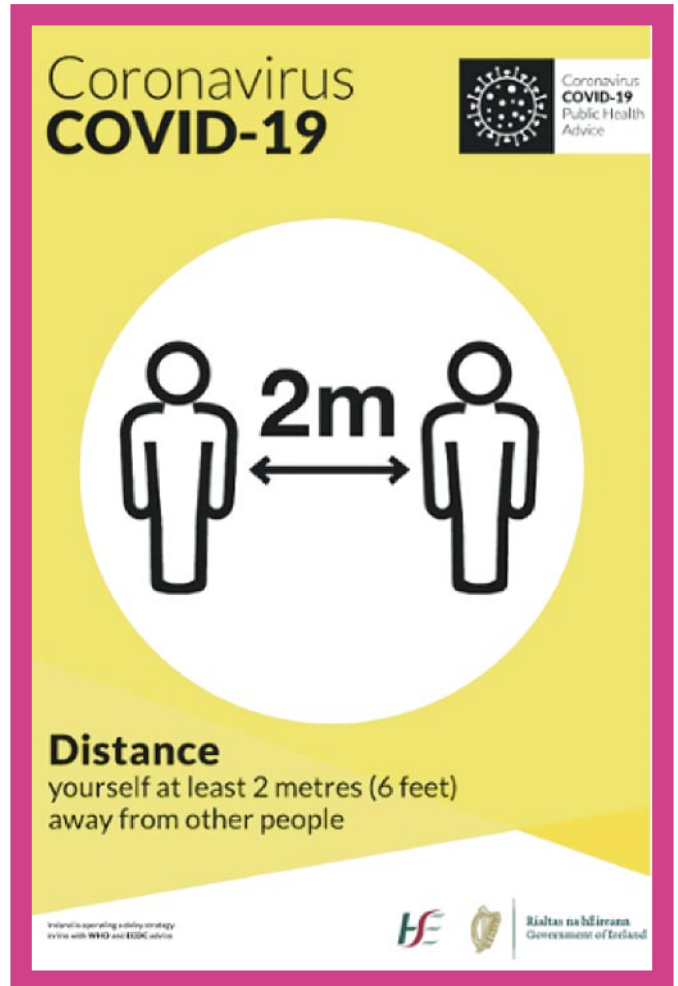


Clare Cassidy, Co. Clare, participating in the NCBI 'Check in and Chat' group.

Clare Cassidy from Co. Clare attends the Check in and Chat every Thursday:

“The Check in and Chat is a brilliant concept. A lot of people who are blind and vision impaired feel isolated because we can't go out. The meeting once a week gives me the time out from my daily life. The human contact that it provides is so important. I have made friends from all around the country who, in normal times I'd have to travel up to Dublin to meet. Being able to talk to others who are in the same situation as me, ask for advice, and just have a chat is really helping my mental health.”

The Challenge of Social Distancing with a Visual Impairment



“Until I was 19 years old I didn't wear any glasses or contact lenses as the doctors didn't feel it would make any difference for me. This meant that my distance vision was very limited. I couldn't see the top letter on the visual acuity chart until I was about two feet away from it. When I became an adult, I harassed my ophthalmologist until he agreed to let me try contact lenses! Amazingly they made a huge difference.

“I am now able to see the top letter of the chart from the regular distance! Oh, this is only in one eye – I can't see any letters with the other one!

Continued on page 6.

Continued from page 5.

“Even with this limited level of vision I have always felt I have a lot of sight compared to others. At school I was encouraged to use a white symbol cane but I flatly refused. I definitely didn’t want people to think I couldn’t see well. More than that though, it felt to me like I was a fraud carrying a cane. I have a very good memory for places that I am familiar with and can fly around like everybody else so to me, using a cane was redundant.

“This attitude has persisted although with age I have matured slightly! When we moved to a new town about six years ago I started using my symbol cane at night (nobody knew me so what did it matter what they thought!) The cane is not to help me find my way or find obstacles but rather to let people know that I have limited sight. In the dark I can still remember where poles are but people keep moving! They need to know to get out of my way so I don’t walk into them.

Keeping a Social Distance

“The necessity to keep a social distance from people due to COVID-19 has brought the use of my cane back into focus. Yes, I am still able to navigate my environment just as well as I used to but now I have to be extra vigilant for the ever moving targets – people! My ability to see in all directions is not great. Unfortunately, I now wear glasses instead of contact lenses and these give me a very restricted field of vision. Also, my ability to judge distances is poor.

“In order to help people stay at the requisite distance from each other in shops etc, there are now signs and floor markings to let people know

where and how to queue. These are very difficult for me to see and make going to my corner shop stressful rather than just an everyday event. When myself and my husband go to our local supermarket to do our weekly shop I am never able to see when the staff member is waving to us to let us know when the checkouts is free.

This can make some people impatient

“Many people are finding the experience of keeping social distance difficult and this can make some impatient if they feel that others are not abiding by the rules. In an ideal world everyone would be patient and understanding and realise what my problem is. They would ask me if I needed help and verbally guide me to where I needed to be. However, other people have difficulties and challenges too.

“Because I have always been very independent and capable, it can be difficult to tell that I have limited vision (my husband knew me for about a month before a friend had to tell him that I was blind!). Therefore, if I want people to realise that I am not deliberately getting too close to them or can’t see where the queue is, I need to take some responsibility for letting them know. The only way I can do this is by using my symbol cane. I definitely don’t like it but sometimes we don’t enjoy doing things that are the best for us and others”.

This post was inspired by an article by Carol Brill in The Journal.ie .

Join our movement for change!



NCBI's advocates have been working together for the past three years to influence change on both local and national issues that affect them, and others who are blind or vision impaired. This valuable work will be continuing throughout 2021 through local advocacy network groups being set up around the country. Members of these groups come together at monthly meetings (currently online) to identify issues they seek to highlight or change in their local areas and within NCBI's national advocacy campaigns.

In 2021, the local networks are becoming more user focused with the group meetings being led by local advocacy group members. Meet David who will be facilitating the Cork meetings: "My name is David Redmond and I'm a visually impaired student from cork. I'm in my second year of a radio broadcasting course in CSN college of further education and I absolutely love it. Radio and technology are my main interests and I feel that technology's improvements over time have many advantages in helping visually impaired or blind people access everyday things.

In the future I would love to get a job in the radio industry or anywhere I can assist people with their technology. I'm will be finished my broadcasting course this year so after that I will wait and see who wants to hire me. Who knows what the future brings?"

To join David in Cork, or any of our groups across the country, or to express your interest in receiving regular updates about NCBI's advocacy work, please contact us at **campaigns@ncbi.ie** with your name, phone number, email and the town where you live.

Meet an Advocate

Hello, my name is Maura Meaney. I have been living in my hometown of Shannon, Co. Clare, since November 2018. After over 26 years in Cork, coming home to Shannon was a big move. I have been vision impaired and hearing impaired since birth and, in terms of eyesight, I have approximately 10% vision and I use a white cane. I hear reasonably well with hearing aids. I work full time in the civil service in Limerick so, while I live in Shannon and have a keen interest in accessibility issues in the Shannon region, I am familiar with and interested in all matters relating to vision impairment and disability in general in the Limerick City area.

Since I was very young, I have always stood up for people, albeit quietly, in situations where I felt they were wronged, where there was an injustice or where a specific action would improve the quality of life for someone, who for whatever reason, was at the time vulnerable. I have a desire to improve life conditions for myself and others, particularly in terms of access

Continued on page 8.

Continued from page 7.



Maura Meaney, Advocate.

to resources, physical environments, employment and education for people with disabilities and specifically those who are blind or vision impaired and those with Dual Sensory Disabilities.

For the above reasons, I joined the NCBI's Local Advocacy Network in Limerick and I have since become involved with the Limerick Public Participation Network engaging with community organisations and the local council on the development of public policy that will enhance the lives of all community members.

I have also been involved with NCBI's Technology Club in the mid-west since it began in 2019. My personal interests include my involvement with Shannon Toastmasters Club, along with reading, writing, walking, and all things cats, especially my pet cat Toby. I am looking forward to facilitating the local advocacy network meetings in Limerick in 2021 and working with members to improve accessibility and inclusion for all.

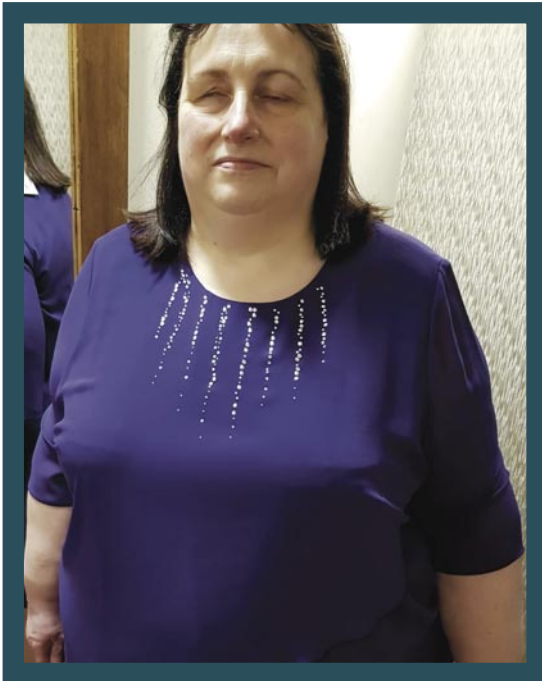
NCBI Library: USB user, Irene Whitely

Our library is the national library for people who are blind or vision impaired and was first established in 1936. We promote independence through literacy and have an extensive catalogue of titles available in alternative formats. We spoke to Irene Whitely who receives titles and publications in USB format from NCBI library.

"I have a condition called Uveitis. I developed it after a viral infection settled in the back of my eyes, and I was diagnosed in 1989, and about 4 or 5 years later I lost the sight in my right eye, since then it has been gradual deterioration."

Irene who is from Carrigaline in the Co. Cork, moved to Kilmallock in Co. Limerick in 1999. "My husband and I bought a bar in Kilmallock. While running the bar, one of our staff in the bar recognised that my sight was getting worse. She mentioned a lady living on the street who also had a sight loss problem, so I just knocked on her one day. We began talking which led to a great friendship; it was this lady who first told me about the library in Dublin where she was getting books on tape, at that time, so she introduced me to the library. When I started getting the books on tape first, I couldn't get my head around just sitting down and listening to a book, and I found it very odd.

Then I contacted the library again a few years later, and they began to send me out the books



Irene Whitely, NCBI Library user.

on a USB stick, I got the boom box then from the shop in Kilkenny to be able to listen to them. I got into listening to books, and I now don't think I could live without them.

I do have a bit of sight left in one eye about 1%, so I do have audio description on some of the television channels, I wouldn't watch, well I mean listen to much TV now, so my primary form of entertainment is the books. I am not into modern technology, so the NCBI library is fantastic; they always send me new texts, call the library up, and send me books of interest to me. There is a fabulous collection of authors, books and genres in the NCBI library.

I also get some magazines from the magazine section like Woman's Way, and I also get the Farmers Journal every two weeks to keep up with what is going on in the farming community which is also great."

If you would like to receive publications in an accessible format that suits you, please contact Tel: 01 8642266 or email us at library@ncbi.ie

NCBI Library — Braille user Anne Roche, Dublin



"I learned to read Braille as a child in St. Mary's in Mount Merrion from 4 years of age and I left when I was 19. It did take me a long time to learn it. I love reading. I find it relaxing to pass the time. When I am reading, I go into another world. I have no sight at all but I can see shadows.

I have been like this since birth. I was a twin and I got too much oxygen when I was born, and this affected my sight, I was three months premature.

I was first introduced to the NCBI library years ago when they were still in Hatch Street. I am amazed at the number of people who read Braille in Ireland; it's a fantastic skill to have.

I enjoy receiving the Insight magazine in Braille, formerly known as The Blind Citizen, it's great to keep up with what is happening in NCBI.

My favourite author is John Grisham and Sheila O'Flanagan, I have 'Asking for It' by Louise O'Neill, which I haven't started yet, but I am looking forward to starting it. "

The 2020 Gerard Byrne Bursary Award recipients celebrate virtually with Minister Simon Harris T.D.

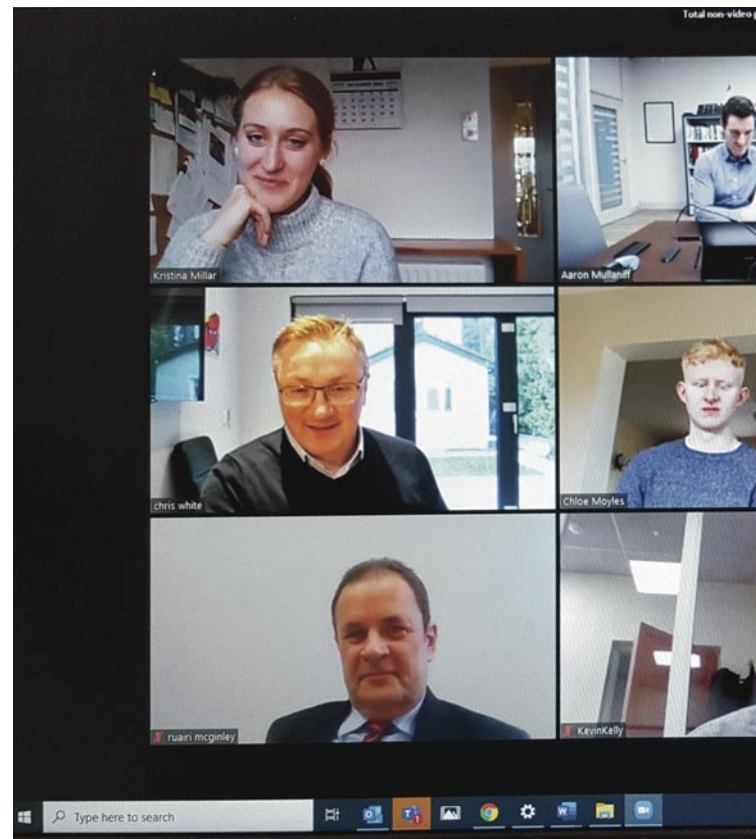
Now in its fourth year, NCBI are delighted to announce the recipients of the 2020 Gerard Byrne Bursary, presented on the 3rd December 2020 by Minister for Higher Education, Simon Harris T.D.

The recipients this year are: **Sean Moyles**, 21, from Crossmolina, Co Mayo who is currently in third year studying Sports Science and Exercise Physiology at Athlone Institute of Technology.

And **Megan Callaghan**, 19, from Ballybofey, Co Donegal, who is currently in second year studying Home Economics and Irish teaching at St Angela's College, Sligo.

Speaking at the virtual presentation Minister Harris said “ensuring equity of access to education is a priority for the Department, and the Gerard Byrne Bursary is especially critical given the low numbers of students with visual impairment and blindness studying in higher education. I commend NCBI for continuing to fund this bursary, which aims to financially support more blind and vision impaired students to cover living and education costs, and ultimately give them greater opportunity to achieve their educational goals.”

Across the education sector, people who are blind and vision-impaired make up just 1.8% of students with disabilities and represent the smallest single grouping of students with disabilities studying at third level (AHEAD, 2020). In reviewing the longer-term trends, in the last 10 years, the numbers of students with sensory disabilities has grown at less than half



of the rate of students with disabilities more generally (AHEAD, 2020).

Chris White, NCBI CEO said “NCBI are proud to be a part of this years awardees future career journey, and on one level, I am hopeful the bursary will facilitate Sean and Megan to better complete their studies alongside their sighted peers. In Ireland just under 1 in 4 people of working age who are blind or vision impaired are participating in the labour force, and the state and NCBI need to work together to address these worrying trends”.

Since its launch in 2017, the bursary has successfully supported 10 students through their

Check out new NCBI Website — www.ncbi.ie

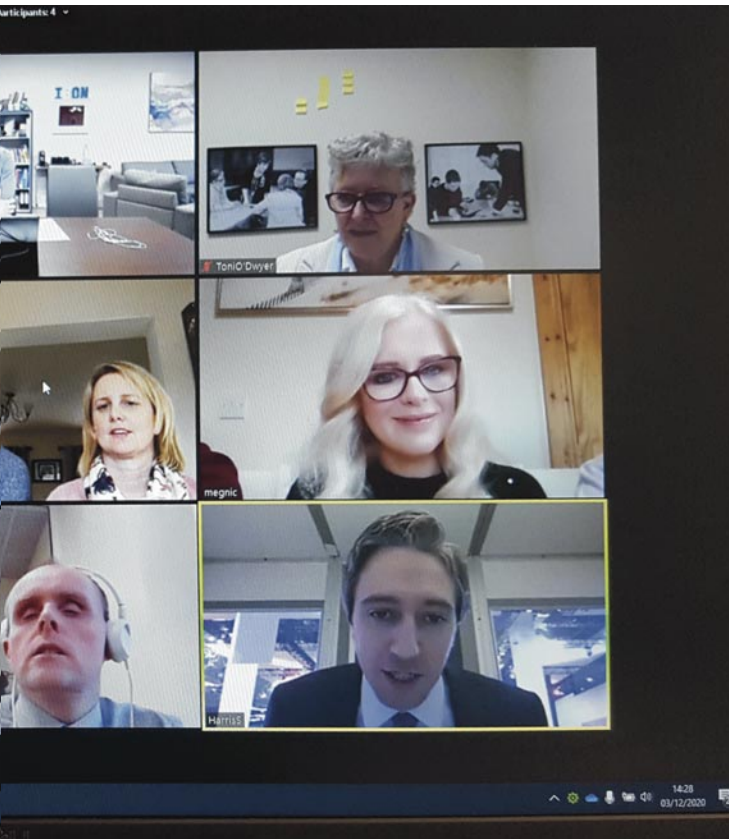


We're thrilled to unveil our new website which we hope you find easy to navigate, informative and interactive. Accessibility is vital so this site is fully accessible to screen readers and those using magnification software. There is also the ability to change the colour contrast in line with your own preferences.

The site provides information on all NCBI services for adults and children across the country as well as the latest news or podcasts released. An interactive events page provides details of various events (happening online or in person) categorised by month or type and enables the user to register their attendance. The online shop has been totally changed too with better descriptions of products and easy checkout facilities. Details of the NCBI retail stores are also available.

The site also boasts a MyNCBI feature allowing service users to register an account which is fully integrated and will provide details of their services received, donations made etc. It is easy to set up and you can easily edit details like a change of address.

We hope you enjoy navigating your way around our website.



Recipients, Minister and participants at the virtual presentation ceremony.

education and into full-time employment. The Gerard Byrne Bursary consists of two annual grants for undergraduate students who are blind or vision impaired studying on a full-time basis at a recognised educational institution in the Republic of Ireland. The value of each scholarship is set at €1,500 per year and continues for the duration of the undergraduate programme chosen by the Bursary winners. NCBI also offer a paid internship opportunity to one Bursary award winner per year.

If you would like to be considered for the Gerard Byrne Bursary 2021 stay tuned for the opening date for applications.

Meet Maggie!

Maggie Richardson is the face behind NCBI's day centres located in Dublin and Wexford, inSight caught up with her to hear what makes Maggie tick and why she is so invested in providing exceptional care to NCBI service users.

My background is quite varied. When I left university, I went to work for an autism charity where I gained skills in working with people who have autism, and specific needs. From that role I became a residential care home manager, before working as teacher. I am a qualified English and literature teacher. Still, I have always worked with those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

From there, I moved to Sense, the UK national deafblind charity. We focused on individual's educational, social care and health needs there. This has given me an excellent grounding for working in NCBI.

The reason I am drawn to working in the sector is a quite personal one; my older brother has a disability called William's Syndrome, which is a learning disability. Growing up I have witnessed first-hand the challenges he had and how hard my parents had to fight for him to access the correct services. I always felt it wasn't fair or right. Working in social and residential care was a massive eye-opener for me regarding the care provided. I always judge a service I manage by whether I would be happy to have my brother in it. The answer has to be yes.

It is an extraordinary role we have, caring and



Maggie Richardson and her older brother.

supporting those with additional needs. For me, it is more than just ensuring my staff have the qualifications, it is also having a passion for caring and appreciating that their role is precious. I am lucky enough to have that in the team here at NCBI. I joined in March 2019 in managing The Iona Resource Centre. Then in September 2020 I additionally started managing the Lochrann Resource Centre in Wexford.

My typical day

I always start the day with a team talk. It is imperative that everyone knows what they are doing and are kept informed. This includes sharing any new information that we may have about a service user. Obviously, with COVID-19, things are different as infection prevention and control is our top priority and every staff member has a role to play in this. When the service

users are on-site, a lot of my role is to check in with each of the service users individually and check to see if we can provide any additional support.

Everything we do is service user-led — “No decision about me, without me!”

It is quite a varied role with lots of planning, assessing needs and linking in with government bodies like the HSE. Everything we do is service user-led and we are driven by the mantra: "No decision about me, without me". This means our timetable is designed to suit our service users. For example, if a service user wants to do some high-intensity training or another wants to learn how to use a new piece of technology, we will facilitate it for them.

In each service centre, we have a Deputy Manager, and Programme Coordinators. They work on session plans allowing the users and the centre to develop further. For example, we have a newly appointed Health and Wellbeing Coordinator who will put together programmes like mindfulness, pilates, boxercise, dance, yoga and many other activities. We have Programme Coordinators for older adults, one for intellectual disabilities as some service users will have additional needs and one for technology. In each centre, we also have a chef and kitchen



Maggie Richardson, LEFT, meeting with Deputy Manager of the NCBI Iona Centre, Tracey Bailey.

assistant, and our general assistants. The available assistants are within the class and help to run the sessions.

The resource centres

The NCBI centres are accessed by anyone who has sight loss, although some may also have additional needs. We have service users from aged 22 up to a few in their late 90s. All will access the day centres for many different reasons. For example, many older adults come for increased social connectedness and to chat with other people. We know that loneliness in Ireland is a massive issue especially if they've restricted mobility and this in turn can affect mental health.

We would also have service users who access us with the hope of getting back to work and they may progress onto the training centre.

Continued on page 14.

Continued from page 13.

Some may be very anxious about returning to work and NCBI can support them with that.

We have 107 service users, and a waiting list of approx. 20 in Dublin.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 forced us to close face to face service for a short time, but it was great to reopen for service on 4th July. That was down to the staff's dedication and hard work within the centre and the broader organisation who recognised how essential these services are to the sight loss community.

COVID-19

During the lockdown, we continued to provide services on a skeletal staff who worked hard to adapt to the service user's needs during a global pandemic. Straight away, we started providing meals on wheels for our service users; we also undertook welfare calls which was a lifeline for many of our service users, who are completely isolated. We delivered different craft bags and resources, including PPE kits. Any service users who may need support around medication and shopping we provided this too. We then developed online classes, workouts and zoom sessions, keeping our service users connected and we have maintained our virtual



Maggie Richardson in conversation with service user, Brian McGurran.

timetable.

Future plans:

I hope to integrate our resource centres into the community further and in-turn our service users into the community. We also hope to develop a social enterprise, where the service users can sell their works of art and the money made through this can then be put into the further development of programmes within the resource centres. Offering potential employment for these service users and linking in with NCBI retail to sell their pieces while simultaneously raising funds for their services within NCBI is a win-win situation.

For more details on NCBI Resource Centres please go to:
www.ncbi.ie/supporting-you/adults/ncbi-resource-centres/

Connection Network – Antoinette Burke, Limerick

When COVID-19 forced the country into lockdown in early 2020 everyone in society suffered, but none more than those living with a disability like sight loss. NCBI continued to provide front line services with new ways to reach and support people online or on the phone. But feedback from those who rely on our services revealed that isolation, loneliness and emotional support were a problem.

Antoinette Burke is an NCBI Volunteer and she found herself at a loose end when home visits to service users were curtailed. NCBI contacted Antoinette about using her conversational skills to help ease isolation among the sight loss community.

"I started as an NCBI volunteer by visiting and reading the paper to a lady once a week. I continued to visit the lady each week. As we got to know each other, we progressed to books and short stories that I brought on those visits.

"Once the pandemic happened a service like that was no longer possible. Not long into the first lockdown, NCBI contacted me to see if I would be interested in becoming involved in a new alternative service, contacting service users every week by telephone. I agreed and I have been involved ever since. I have been assigned five people and contact each of them. Each call is different, some people are more talkative than others. We talk about all sorts of things; we might chat about what is happening in the world, or what has happened to them since we last spoke, we talk about their families, stories of



**Antoinette
Burke, NCBI
Volunteer with
the
'Connection
Network'.**

their lives, or music and sport. I feel I am in a privileged position that these people share their stories with me.

"Over time, we have gotten to know each other. It might just be a friendly chat or catch up. In these times a lot of social contacts have dropped, and it is much more isolating to a person with sight loss".

"If you would like to join the "**Connection Network**" and have a few hours to spare each week, I would say go ahead and see if it's for you. You get a chance to chat with wonderfully interesting people and you can add a diversion and a bit of light to brighten up someone's day. With volunteering, you get back a lot more than you put in. It is a two-way street, and a mutually beneficial service. I hope that when I call service users, they look forward to my call, but equally, I look forward to calling them and having interesting conversations." If you are interested in being involved in "**Connection Network**" please contact **Olivia.Harrington@ncbi.ie**

Life with a visual impairment

By Patrick Morgan

Growing up with a visual impairment was hard, children jeered me because I couldn't see very well. With the help of Child Vision, a national organisation for blind children, I received the help I needed, successfully graduating from secondary school.

Computer course at NCBI

I went on to complete a Fetac Level 4 course in Sports & Recreation at Roslyn Park College. Earlier this year I completed a computer course at NCBI. With their support, in March 2020, I successfully applied for a course in journalism at Colaiste Dhulaigh College of Further Education.

Good Support from the College

With the COVID-19 lockdown, it looked as if it would take my dream course away, but thankfully the course proceeded online. My visual impairment continues to be challenging, given the high level of visual content. But with good support from the college, I am making steady progress, learning how to improve my web blogs and new skills, writing blogs and articles. I am enjoying the course and



NCBI Service user and Blogger, Patrick Morgan.

hope other visually impaired people see it as an option for them.

As my sight deteriorated, hitting into things

became more prevalent. I resisted using a cane, stubbornly thinking I could get around safely without one.

I gained confidence

While I attended NCBI, I learned how to use a cane; function rather than looking cool won the day. I gained confidence the more I used the cane, and now I wouldn't go anywhere without it. I would encourage other visually impaired people to use a cane as people are more aware and understanding when they see it. It has significantly helped in developing my independence skills over the last year.

Sport is my Thing

Despite my visual impairment, from an early age, sport was my thing. I played football from the age of 6 to 15 years, but as my vision deteriorated, I had to stop playing with fully sighted peers and moved to Sportsclub 15, a Special Olympics club on a social level where I continue to play. I also like golf, having played my first game of pitch& putt when I was 11 years old. I enjoyed it and soon started to play a few holes with my dad. I completed my first game of golf (18 holes) when I was a teenager. I loved it and got the bug to play more.

Irish Blind Golf

One summer, when I was off school, I just played golf for the whole summer. By chance, I found out about Irish Blind Golf. My dad agreed to be my guide, and I went along to one of their monthly outings at Westmanstown Golf Club in 2013. They were very welcoming, and I really enjoyed the day. I have been playing ever since, and Irish Blind Golf gave me the opportunity to take part in International Blind Golf Competitions.

Over the last few years, I've played in the World Blind Golf Championships in Japan; in the US Blind Golf Open in Arizona, a second World Blind Championship in Rome, and then in the British Blind Open.

Winning the Italian Blind Open

The best trip was playing golf in Japan because the country is so clean; the golf course was in immaculate condition, and the food was different, I would certainly recommend a trip to Japan. My best golfing experience was winning the Italian Blind Open in 2016, which was one of the proudest moments of my life.

Developing 'Independence Skills'

Sport truly is available for all — visual impairment or not! But this COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult. Golf courses have been mostly closed, and international competitions have stopped. While waiting for it to restart, I am developing my independence skills and zoom sessions with a personal trainer to help me maintain a good level of fitness.

My advice to younger people with a vision impairment is, believe in yourself. Take the available help and don't be vain, use a cane, it's a great aid.

You can follow me on:

Instagram @patrickmorgangolfer

on Facebook @irelandsblindgolfer

and @patrickmorganj1 on Twitter.

Tree of Light



A massive thank you to all our corporate friends who supported our Tree of Light Christmas Campaign and gifted €30,000, which will be used to support our VisAble employment project.

VisAble is set up to help 40 candidates secure meaningful full-time employment or full-time education over the next 18 months.



Eye Can Weekly Lottery

Congratulations to our weekly winners so far this year and thank you for supporting us.



John Tyrell, Ballycullen, Dublin.

Dawn Browne, Lucan, Dublin.

Una Geoghan, Killiney.

Richard Duncliffe, Cork.

Helen O'Neill, Dooradoyle, Limerick.

You can view all our weekly winners on

www.ncbi.ie

Why don't you sign up to our €2 weekly draw (€8.80 monthly) and you could be receiving a cheque for €200 while supporting the sight loss community.

Sign up at www.ncbi.ie or call Joanne 01 8821970.

Walking Champion!



Pictured: Joe and his wife Kathleen presenting a cheque to NCBI staff Sharon and Debbie.

Joe Dowling, from Newcastle West Co. Limerick, took on a challenge to walk 200 miles in the month of December and raise funds for NCBI. Joe raised an outstanding €3,345.

A huge thanks to Robert!



While out for a walk 11-year-old Robert Ward from Dublin wondered how people with sight loss navigated through the world, especially now during Covid.

After thinking about this more, he decided to try it for himself and be blindfold for a day and raise money for NCBI.

What an extraordinary act, putting himself in the shoes of someone who lives a different life to his! His Mum Joan said:

"He was very disciplined and wore the blindfold all day long with no peeking at all'. Robert is a shining example of the importance of raising awareness of the realities people face daily. Well done, Robert, and thank you.

If you are interested in doing fundraising activities, please email fundraising@ncbi.ie

ROWfit Virtual Indoor Rowing Race 2020



Edel Fitzpatrick and Senan Griffin before she completed her row.

Edel Fitzpatrick competed in the Irish indoor rowing championships (virtually) - ROWfit Virtual Indoor Rowing Race 2020 in November on live stream, coming second in her age category nationally.

Edel Fitzpatrick owns CrossFit gym in Sligo and decided to do something positive and inspiring while her gym was closed due to lockdown. She raised considerable funds for NCBI in her local community for Senan Griffin, a friend who grew up with Edel in Clare. Senan lost his sight in 2009 and is a service user of NCBI. He is now a keen athlete and gym owner himself in Clare.

She was supported by family and friends, as well as members of her gym club and raised well over €1,500. Edel has a personal connection with people with sight loss and says: 'it really was my pleasure to help out, as the cause means a lot to me'.

Thank you so much for your magnificent support Edel Fitzpatrick (Gym CrossFit Sligo).

Sustainable Pop-Up Shop Opens on Grafton Street: Re-Newed for NCBI

In December 2020 NCBI opened Grafton Streets first ever charity pop-up shop for the Christmas period. On hand to celebrate was Minister for Environment, Eamon Ryan and TV presenter and fashion designer Sonya Lennon along with well-known bloggers including Emily Rochford and Tara Stewart.

Called Re-Newed for NCBI, the shop showcased and sold high quality designer stock which has been generously donated by Irish designers, celebrities and the public. Lainey Keogh, Simone Rocha, Chupi Sweetman and Melissa Curry have all donated their designs as well as clothing donations from Sonya Lennon, Cillian Murphy, Triona McCarthy and Daniel O'Donnell.

There was also crafts for sale made by artists who are blind or vision impaired and use NCBI services. This was 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.

Chris White, NCBI CEO said "For NCBI being positioned on Grafton Street ahead of Christmas gave us a unique opportunity to launch our Re:Newed for NCBI brand specific for this store and to challenge customer perceptions of pre-worn and vintage clothes, in true sustainable spirit. Customers are becoming more conscious of the impact of fast fashion on the planet and realising that charity shopping is the green engine of the high street." The shop at 110 Grafton Street was kindly donated to NCBI by



ABOVE: at the opening of the Re:Newed for NCBI shop in Grafton Street, L-R: Pauline Byrne, Ruairi McGinley, Sonya Lennon, Minister Eamon Ryan T.D., and Marie Noh.



RIGHT: the interior of the Re:Newed shop.

Irish Life for the month of December. Martin O'Reilly, Head of Property, Irish Life Investment Managers said "We are delighted to be able to support the team at NCBI by providing this

Re:Newed
for
NCBI



space on Grafton Street it gave shoppers the opportunity to pick up some incredible gifts whilst supporting a charity which does such great work in Ireland.”

Virtual Touch Typing and Virtual iPad with Voiceover Courses



Virtual Touch Typing Course for Beginners

The Virtual Touch Typing Course is for anyone who would like to learn how to Touch Type. This absolute beginner's course includes: step by step, instructor-led training on the QWERTY keyboard, ergonomics and correct posture, achieving accuracy and fluency. The student will also be provided with audio practice files throughout the training course. Participants will have the ability to Touch Typing by the end of the training.

iPad with VoiceOver for Beginners

The Beginners iPad with VoiceOver training course is a virtual training course that will introduce the absolute beginner to VoiceOver the gestures required for navigating their device. It includes learning the gestures for: navigating apps, screens and setting options, exploring by touch, automatic reading, changing values, using app switcher, closing down open apps, turning the screen curtain on/off, turning VoiceOver speech on/off, and using Siri to create notes and lists.

If you are interested in participating in either of these virtual courses, please email miriam.kelly@ncbi.ie

Alexa Accessibility – Show and Tell on the Echo Show

Amazon's Alexa is not just using voice to provide assistance to users. A feature called "Show and Tell" is enabling blind and low vision customers to identify items using an Echo Show device.

What is the Echo Show Device?

The Amazon Echo Show is a smart speaker that is part of the Amazon Echo line of products. Similar to other devices in the family, it is designed around Amazon's virtual assistant Alexa, but additionally features a touchscreen that can be used to display visual information to accompany its responses, as well as play video and conduct video calls with other Echo Show users. The Amazon Echo Show comes in various sizes. Amazon's Echo Show line-up includes three models – the 10-inch Echo Show, 8-inch Echo Show, and the 5.5-inch Echo Show.

What is Show and Tell for Alexa?

Show and Tell is an accessibility feature that identifies items using your Echo Show's camera. All you need to do is hold up a product in front of your Echo Show's camera and ask Alexa to identify it. Alexa tells you what you're holding and provides a brief description.

There is a built-in tutorial on Echo Show devices. To learn more about this feature say, "Help with Show and Tell". The tutorial gives you product placement hints, sounds to expect, and camera tips. For more help with using Show and Tell, say "More help with Show and Tell."

Want to find out more?

Call us on 1850 92 30 60 or email labs@ncbi.ie.



Emerging Tech – Interview with Javier Pita, CEO of NaviLens

NCBI Labs recently caught up with the CEO and developer of NaviLens, Javier Pita Lozano, to find out about this company's innovative variation of QR codes and its many applications, including as a navigation system for people with sight loss.

Q1. Can you give us a description of what NaviLens does?

NaviLens is a new kind of QR code that can be read from a very long distance without focusing on it up to 12 meters away. It's like visual braille that can be easily read with any camera on mobile phones without knowing exactly where it is, and of course without touching it!

NaviLens gives the user not only the distance but the exact direction to the element where the NaviLens code is.

It was created after five years of intense research and development. The NaviLens codes are being incorporated rapidly in cities around the world to make more spaces accessible like bus stops, bus terminals, train stations, museums, hospitals, etc.

Q2. What was the original inspiration behind

NaviLens?

We noticed that any indoor unknown space, not previously visited, was very challenging for vision impaired



Javier Pita.

people, so we decided to create something that could be easily added to the signage indications so that they would be able to read it, to make any space more accessible for the users.

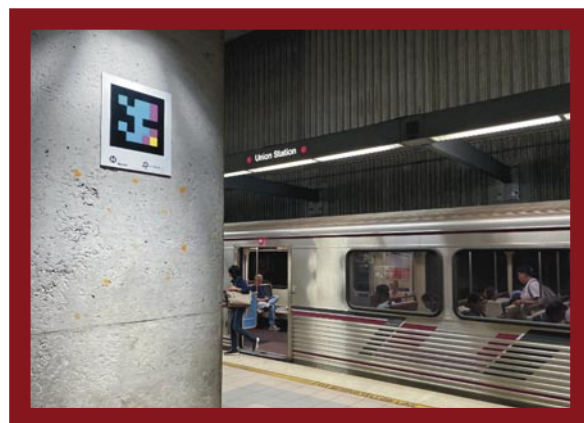
It is the signage equivalent functionality that sighted people use when they want to achieve a destination inside a facility. They follow the visual signage indications. Signage is present in all the facilities of the world, so making it visible for visually impaired users in the most sustainable way to scale it, was the inspiration to do the project.

Q3. What is the advantage of the colour codes used by NaviLens over standard QR codes?

The standard QR codes use only black and white to store the information, so it needed more points/cells to write the information on them. We use a lot of colours, so we can store more information in one single cell, and this allows us to make the points bigger to be able to scan it from a very long distance without focusing on it.

Q4. Where is NaviLens already used in public?

In public we are prioritising the transit sector because mobility is key for the community. We have implemented the NaviLens technology bus



stops, subway stations and train stations around the world, like in Barcelona, New York, Los Angeles, etc.

We are implementing technology in museums and hospitals as well. The solution scales very well because, in the end, it's as easy as adding the NaviLens codes to the current signage elements, so the owners of the spaces are very receptive to add this technology that is simple to implement and has very low maintenance.

Q5. Where are we likely to find more NaviLens tags appearing in the future?

Hopefully soon in Ireland transit organizations and some buildings in your lovely country!

Q6. If someone is interested, how can they try out NaviLens?

NaviLens is a free app that be downloaded from the App Store and Google Play Store. Indeed, any user can download free NaviLens codes in the App and use it to tag any domestic item for daily life. With NaviLens, friends and family can also share this information with others, which is super useful.

You can watch an interview with Javier Pita from NaviLens on Live Event 24 on YouTube.



NCBI Labs Braille Support Group



Formed last year to increase the level of support for Braille devices and help keep you up to date with the latest news and developments in the world of Braille.

**For help,
information or to get involved please email us on
braille@ncbi.ie**