

inSight

Magazine

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NCBI

Working for People
With Sight Loss



ON AIR

David Redmond The media man

inSight Contents:

NCBI Policy & Advocacy

Pages 3 - 6

- NCBI presents to Oireachtas Committee on e-scooter usage in Ireland.
- Quintessential keyboard warriors.
- Ad — Join Local Advocacy Networks.



NCBI Services

Pages 7 - 13

- Fun and Antics exposed at Ballymuck exchange.
- Carúl Ní Hale.
- Vision Sports Ireland 2021 highlights!
- Workplace integration and partner officers.
- Voice of Vision Impairment.



NCBI People Profile

Meet NCBI service user, David Redmond from Cork — the media man!

See Pages 13 - 14.



NCBI Foundation

Pages 15 - 16

- DJ Grimes meets his hero Donnacha O'Callaghan.
- NCBI's Eye Can draw — Be in to win!
- Ad — Move Into The Light with NCBI in March!



NCBI Retail

Pages 17 - 18

- NCBI's opens new shop on Capel Street, Dublin.
- NCBI Retail winners of Team Member of the Quarter!



Technology

Pages 19 - 24

- Talking Technology with NCBI Labs Podcasts.
- NCBI Labs virtual training courses.
- Introducing the BlindShell Classic 2 Talking Mobile Telephone.
- Amazon adds a male voice option to its smart speakers.
- Ad — NCBI Labs Virtual Clubs.



NCBI presents to Oireachtas Committee on e-scooter usage in Ireland

Proposed legislation is currently going through the Dáil and Seanad which seeks to enforce rules for the use of e-scooters in Ireland. NCBI is working with the Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind and the Irish Wheelchair Association with the aim of influencing changes to the current version of the proposed legislation. We wish to prioritise the safety of people with disabilities and access needs.

In November, the three organisations published a position paper with specific asks based on engagement with service users. NCBI held a meeting for advocates to discuss the position paper and to encourage and support advocates to contact their local TDs and Senators.

The volume of e-scooter usage is increasing daily, and it is vital that the correct legal frameworks and infrastructure are in place to ensure the safety of disabled pedestrians. Some of our proposed amendments to the legislation include:

- Prohibition of e-scooters from use on footpaths and in shared spaces;
- Provision for installation of a universal sound solution, which is robustly tested and researched, to allow pedestrians to hear e-scooters approaching;
- Maximum speed limits of 12 kilometres per hour will apply with lower speed limits of six kilometres per hour in designated areas;
- There is designated parking infrastructure.



In January, NCBI, the Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind and the Irish Wheelchair Association were invited to speak to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Transport to discuss our position paper. Representatives from the three organisations, including NCBI advocate Joanne Murphy, shared concerns with the committee.

We would encourage you to contact TDs and Senators in your area to highlight any concerns you have about e-scooters. TDs and Senators represent you in the Dáil and Seanad so it is important they are aware of your experiences and concerns so they can bring them forward during the legislative process.

We hope to have detailed engagement with relevant Ministers and the Department of Transport to ensure the legislation prioritises safety for all pedestrians.

The quintessential keyboard warriors

by Brian Manning

When I graduated from U.C.C in 1991, I quickly realised that as a blind person I would either have to go into technology as a career or at a very minimum I would have to use technology in whatever career I decided to embark in. With this in mind, I enrolled in a very intensive postgraduate course in the university called the H Dip in Computer Science.

This programme was the hardest year of work I have ever experienced. That is of course until Denis Nolan took over as manager of the NCBI Labs team! I tell you that man could quite easily find himself in an Alex Haley novel!

My seminal theory, however, remains even more true today, that technology still serves as a potential bridge for vision impaired people to full employment.

Back in the early 1990s, you had two basic hubs of industry in Ireland. You had technology companies largely based in Dublin and the pharmaceutical giants largely based in Cork.

Now you have a proliferation of technology firms around all of the big urban centres of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway and even some of the smaller outlier towns such as Killorglin in Kerry and Westport in Mayo host major tech firms. Indeed, most of the major tech companies have their European headquarters located in Ireland.

To further support my argument, all of the academic and technical universities have a presence in most counties now, providing everyone with excellent access to brilliantly resourced and fantastically delivered training programmes in technology. The increased volume of NCBI service users that are also enrolling in these courses is encouraging.

I do not have to state here the impact that ever-evolving assistive technology applications such as screen readers, magnification software packages and accessible apps are having in the professional development of blind and vision impaired people.

This then further begs the question, why are there such high levels of unemployment among vision impaired and blind service users? Only 24% of people who are blind or vision impaired are in employment.

The transition from second level to third level education for people who are vision impaired has been very successfully managed with numbers making the transition to college or further education growing every year. But it is the transition from third level into employment that we are finding more challenging.

They speak of glass ceilings blocking the progress and advancement of certain minority groups but, in my experience, our service users are confronting a glass door in that we seem to be finding a huge barrier in even getting across the threshold of many major tech companies.

“

Why are there such high levels of unemployment among vision impaired and blind service users?

Only 24% of people who are blind or vision impaired are in employment.

”

Several years ago, I organised a jobs club for local service users in the Cork and Kerry region. I was extremely confident that I would be able to fill a work experience module among local tech companies for my club participants and was appalled at how difficult I found it. The HR offices just did not seem interested in even giving our people work experience.

This is an anomaly that must be challenged. NCBI launched its Seeing Your Career campaign in 2021 to highlight this issue. It put forward several recommendations for both Government and employers to implement, ranging from availability of person-centred equipment grants to greater take up of disability awareness training among HR managers. NCBI is also working directly with a range of employers to break down this glass door and create greater levels of understanding of the amazing tech skills people who are blind or vision impaired have at their fingertips. But more needs to be done. The extras we need can include more widespread inclusive recruitment practices, utilising NCBI skills to educate more employers and debunking myths about disability so we can focus on ability and capacity.

We need to get the message out there, that, where technically savvy professionals are being sought, our service users are among the most competent of all.

Without a mouse in sight, we are the true keyboard warriors.

We have a central part to play, not only in our own personal development, but in the development of Ireland's tech industry and in the progression of the country at large. With so many job vacancies presently, we are an untapped pool of candidates with plenty of skills on offer and we should not be overlooked as ideal candidates for a given role.

Incidentally, three of the people who joined our local jobs club a number of years ago are now working in various tech capacities. So, perseverance can pay off and the odd glass door can be kicked in.

But the reality remains that such high unemployment numbers among our service users in such a highly concentrated tech economy cannot and should not be accepted.

Are you a person living with sight loss?



Would you like to get involved in positive change for people who are blind, or vision impaired at a local and national level?



Join one of our Local Advocacy Networks and/or sign up for regular updates on our National Advocacy Network mailing list.

NAN

What is the National Advocacy Network?

The NAN is mailing list that allows us to share our updates and news about NCBI's advocacy and policy work.

By joining the NAN, you can keep updated with the issues that impact on you and on the community of people who are blind or vision impaired in Ireland.

LANs

What are Local Advocacy Networks?

A LAN is a group of local people who are blind or vision impaired and keen to advocate for change on issues affecting them in their local areas while also lending their support to NCBI's wider national advocacy campaigns.

The LAN members are supported and trained by the NCBI advocacy team.

How do I join?

Join a Local Advocacy Network near you and sign up for the National Advocacy Network by emailing campaigns@ncbi.ie or tel: **01 830 7033** and ask for the Advocacy Team.



Working for People with Sight Loss

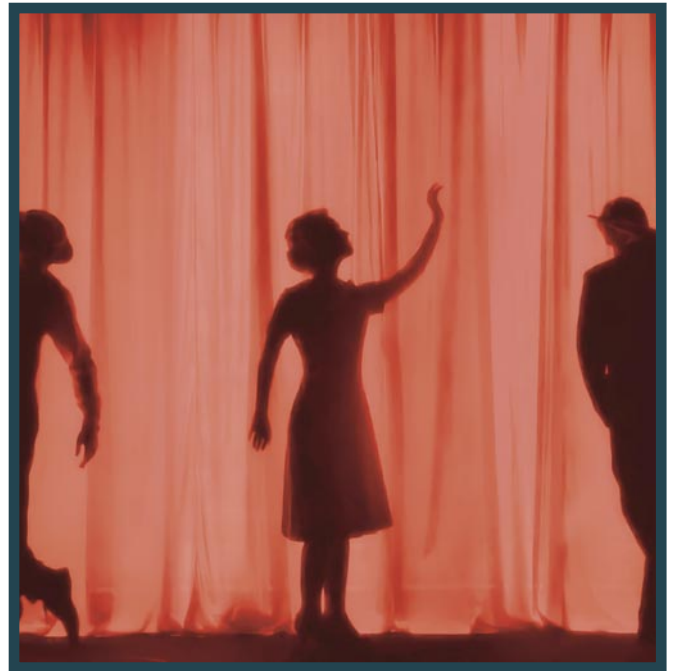
Fun and antics exposed at the Ballymuck Exchange

Throughout Covid19, the members of White Cane Audio Theatre (Sightless Cinema) continued to work from home on their thespian pursuits and crafted the Ballymuck Exchange which features some colourful characters, as we eavesdrop on their calls in and out of Ballymuck Telephone Exchange.

The show premiered on Culture Night in the Civic Theatre in Tallaght, Co. Dublin. Artistic Director Ciaran Taylor and Sound Engineer Gerry Horan had put the final touches together with contemporary sound effects so not even the cast had experienced the play in its entirety.

It's a cold November night in the early 1970s. Denis is settling in for a quiet night operating one of the last manual telephone exchanges, in the close-knit village of Ballymuck...somewhere near Drogheda. Tony! A reluctant "blow-in" to Ballymuck needs an ambulance for his wife Sinead who has gone into labour. The local GP is involved in a poker game in Dolly's Arms and the new bookish Garda has everyone on edge. To add fuel to the fire, an urgent international call comes into the exchange from the Missions in Africa. Denis is even more confused so his wires get crossed. Before too long, the normally peaceful village gets caught up in the tangle.

From the beginning of the opening tune to the baby finally making its way into the world, the



play revealed a combination of mishaps and misunderstandings as the telephone operator Denis, who is increasingly "under the weather", did his best to manage a difficult situation as the story line continued to unfold.

The play was very well received, and the cast took a well-deserved bow at the end.

Sightless Cinema is a group of blind and visually impaired people creating live audio events in cinemas since 2015, where blind and sighted people can share unique listening experiences in the dark together, and all the pictures are in your head. If you wish to join Sightless Cinema group please email:

whitecaneaudiotheatre@gmail.com

Carúl Ní Hale

I suddenly lost my vision in my right eye in December 2019 and my left eye now has only blurry vision in the upper third. This is all due to Non-Arteritic Ischaemic Optic Neuropathy. I was of course worried about what this would mean for my independence and ability to do the things that I enjoy.

The brilliant 'One Cup'

My minister at The Salvation Army helped me to contact the NCBI and I soon found myself being told about a whole host of gadgets which mean I can make my cups of tea (the brilliant One Cup) and use the controls on kitchen appliances with the help of little orange dots!

Amazing Seeing AI app and Libre app.

My biggest concern was how to manage my diabetes as I could no longer see to prick my finger or read the results on the device. I found the amazing Seeing AI app and Libre app, all used on my iPhone which means I can manage my diabetes myself. The Seeing AI app has been great for reading documents and its facial recognition descriptions have caused much hilarity (and insults!). There is even a Bible app which means I can keep up with everyone in church!

Assistive technologies on my laptop

Seamus from the NCBI was absolutely brilliant. He patiently taught me how to use the assistive technologies on my laptop. This means that as well as being able to send and read emails, I have also been able to continue in my role as treasurer for the church. I use Seeing AI to



Carúl Ní Hale.

check the bank notes and read cheques, and the assistive technology to read spreadsheets and other information.

Support of the NCBI

It has been a steep learning curve at times, but with the support of the NCBI, family and friends I have discovered there is still a life to be had after losing sight and sight loss can't stop me doing anything. I just approach things in a slightly different way.

If you experience sight loss and wish to avail of NCBI services please contact the NCBI Info Line on 1800 911 250.

Vision Sports Ireland 2021 Highlights

2021 was a busy year for Vision Sports Ireland as we balanced active engagement in sport and keeping the people involved safe.

The year began with an online exercise series where members could try various classes from the comfort of their homes. After a positive response Vision Sports will continue to offer this service moving into 2022 and beyond.

As we moved into the spring, the 40th Annual MayFest event was held online with the theme “Reeling In The Years”. Old and new faces reminisced as they joined exercise classes and webinars. Summer was soon upon us and, thankfully, we could meet in person. Football, tennis and tandem cycling returned to action. In June we trailed our first Tandem Pilot Training course with Cycling Ireland, hosted by Galway Visually Impaired Activity Club.

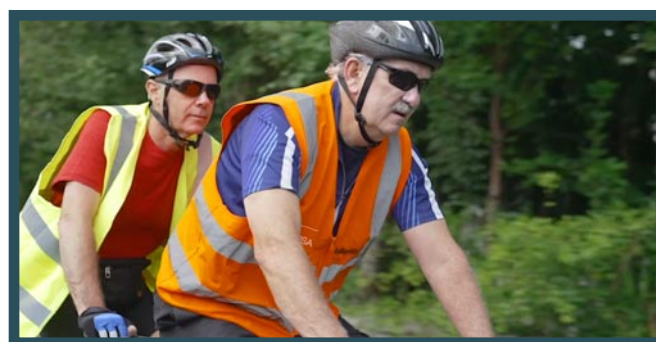
September brought great opportunities as some members had the experience of a lifetime driving a dual controlled Mini Cooper around the international motor racing circuit Mondello Park and becoming a rally navigator for a day at the inaugural Zero Limits event. Other events during the week included Golf at Portlaoise Golf Club and the launch of Vision Impaired Rugby at Old Wesley Rugby Club, Dublin.

The first Vision Sports Ireland Youth Leadership programme was launched in October with ten teenagers engaging in the 6-week leadership programme.

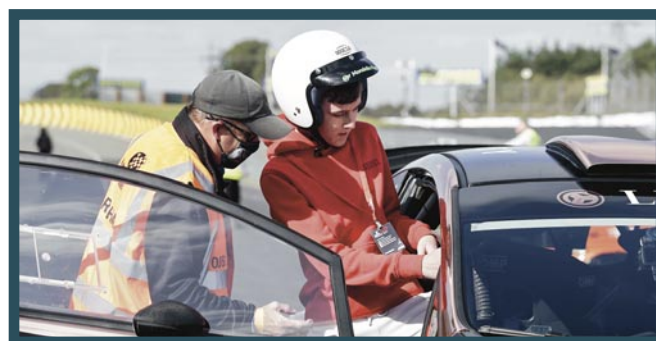
As the year concluded we launched our very first training course aimed at increasing knowledge of vision impairment in the community for volunteers, coaches, and



Vision Sport — Youth Leadership participants.



Vision Sport — Tandem Cycling.



Vision Sport — Zero Limits, Sean Douglas.

teachers. Vision Sports Awareness Training was launched at the National Sports Campus by Paralympic athletes Martin Gordon and Eamonn Byrne along with outgoing CEO of Sport Ireland John Treacy.

2022 will bring more excitement and continued collaboration with the national governing bodies for sport in Ireland and NCBI colleagues.

Voice of Vision Impairment

By Robbie Sinnott

In March, 2018, Ireland finally ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD). Some of us visually impaired people in Ireland who had a history of activism in campaigning for our collective Human Rights began to pay close attention to what this would mean in practice in terms of our toolkit for future campaigning.

There was a sense that we were constantly firefighting, either collaboratively, or on behalf of others, and we looked forward to firmer ground that would see us troubleshoot from the earliest stages of legislation, so that firefighting would no longer be necessary.

Voice of Vision Impairment

In July 2019, several of us got together to form Blind Rights Ireland, which quickly became Voice of Vision Impairment (VVI). The reason we came together was to meet the CRPD's definition of what is a 'representative organisation', which the UN Committee had published as General Comment 7, in November 2018.

Representative organisations have become more widely known as Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs). They must be explicitly founded with the primary focus on campaigning for and defending of our Human Rights, as visually impaired people in our case. A clear majority of a DPO's members must be disabled, and it must be led and run solely by disabled

people – visually impaired people in our case, of course. It should be distinguished from disability service providers, whose role is quite different, and it must be open to membership of everyone in its constituency (in our case, every visually impaired person in Ireland).

Ireland is a bit behind the curve

The CRPD gives extraordinary power to DPOs, including that they must be prioritised in all consultations affecting disabled people, and they must be closely included in planning and policies from the earliest stages. Very good examples of how this works can be seen in New Zealand, Australia, and Canada, among others. As is often the case, Ireland is a bit behind the curve, having only ratified the CRPD in 2018, and it is not even quite fully implemented yet.

However, we are at a crucial point in Ireland's bedding in of the CRPD, and for generations of visually impaired people to come in Ireland, we see the important need to grasp this opportunity and make sure the CRPD is properly implemented, and that visually impaired people in Ireland have their independent voice properly recognised.

Not only have we been hard at work campaigning for DPO rights at the top level, but we have been getting stuck into the bread-and-butter issues too. We have very close relationships with a growing number of State agencies, such as public transport companies: Transport Infrastructure Ireland, National Transport Authority; An Post, ComReg, and the



CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Commission for Regulation of Utilities. We also sit on several Strategic Policy Committees of various local authorities as well as several local authority disability housing steering groups. Like the NCBI, VVI sits on the State's Disability Voting Working Group.

Among the recent issues we have been dealing with are:

- Accessible communications from An Post, energy, and phone companies;
- Shared space plans throughout the country (for example, in Athenry and Tralee);
- Problems with Dublin Bus's new electric buses because of their silent engines and lack of audio announcements;
- Issues caused by outdoor dining throughout the country;
- No kerb step for a Gaelscoil bus stop in Clonmel;
- Need for parity of the Blind Pension with the Disability Allowance, and an increase in both.

Like the NCBI, we have been campaigning for necessary amendments to the new e-scooter

legislation, and we very much look forward to collaborating with the NCBI on the issue of accessible websites and apps of public bodies.

We very much welcome members from anywhere in Ireland and membership is free. The only condition is that you must be either visually impaired yourself or be a parent of a child who is visually impaired. Membership will mean you get updates on VVI's activities; you can opt into consultations; and feed in your experiences so that they shape our actions and policies. On the most basic level though, if you prefer, we will just keep you in the loop about the main events.

To join VVI, simply email info@vvi.ie with your name and local authority area (if you know it). Otherwise, you can ask any VVI rep that you know of to have you signed up.

For those who are interested, we are always looking for people to get more involved as VVI reps, where you will also be at the decision-making core of VVI.

For more information see www.vvi.ie

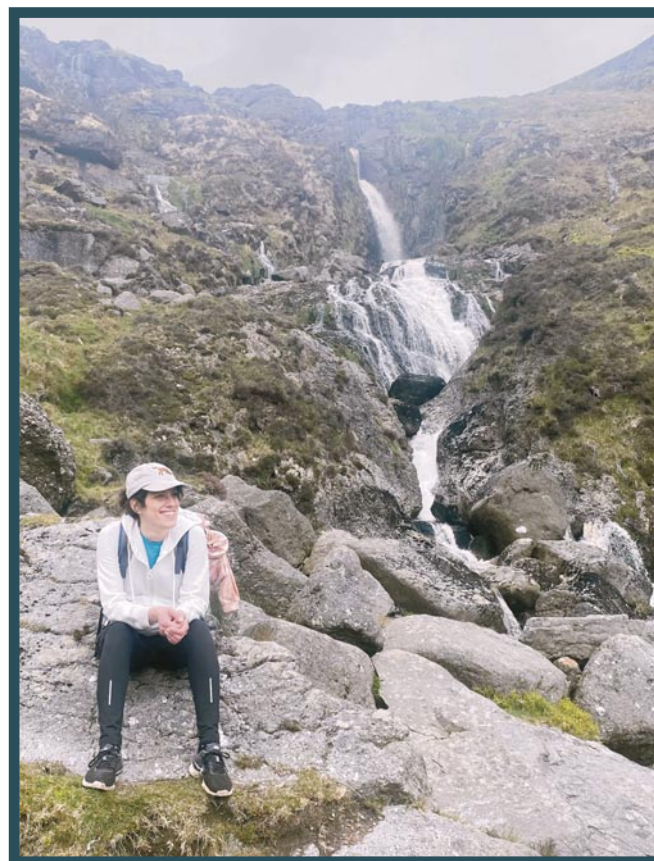
Workplace integration and partner officers

As a part of the Employment Team, our dedicated workplace integration and partner officers (WIPOs) are based in Dublin and Cork. They serve as a link between our service users and potential employers.

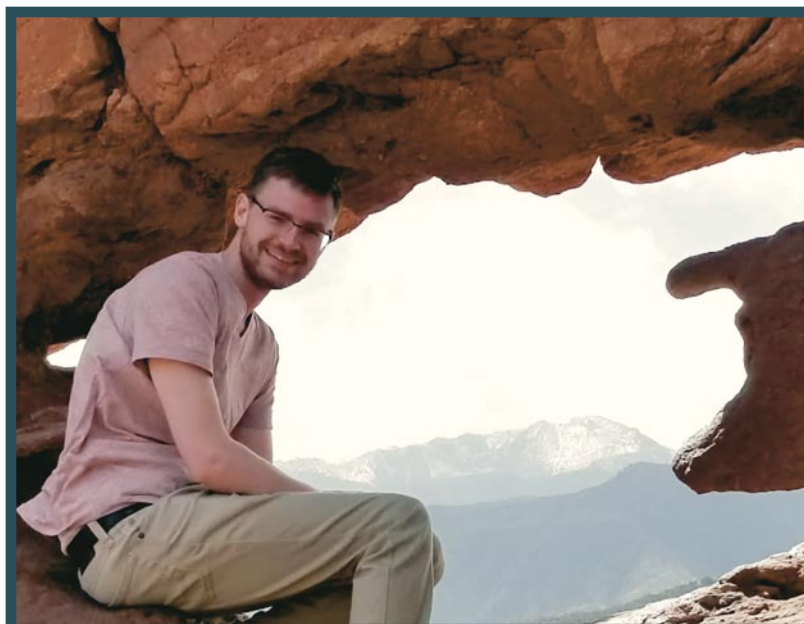
The WIPOs have been developing a database of potential workplace partners, compiling not only their contact information but also in-depth reports on their disability policies, schemes and inclusion efforts.

After their successful "Let's Talk Accessibility" online webinar series that took place in 2021, they will roll out a new free series starting from March. With their guest speakers, the WIPOs will be sharing success stories and breaking down fear and stigma about disabilities. So, keep your eyes on our event section to sign up!

In addition to that, there are exciting collaborations in the plan for April, May, and June, when work shadow days will be organised for our service users in collaboration with **Towards Work initiative**. All these exciting events will be advertised on NCBI's official website over the upcoming weeks.



Workplace integration officer Martina Melvan at Mahon Falls in Ireland.



Workplace integration officer Shane Merritt at Garden of Gods in Colorado.

David Redmond — The media man

David Redmond is a self-confessed 'radio broadcasting nerd' who has lived with a vision impairment since birth. His love of radio and media wasn't something that happened overnight.

He explained: 'It wasn't one thing. It was a collection of little things over years. I did a radio summer camp at U.C.C here in Cork. There were loads of different events, but ultimately when it came to filling out the CAO form and when it came to looking at QQI courses and all these different things that you do from fifth and sixth year on, radio was the only real option I considered at that point, I guess.'

Although David enjoys presenting on radio, he said that in the future he would like to be involved behind the scenes in a research or business capacity within a media organisation. He joked: I do love the media industry with a passion. I'm willing to do anything if anybody is willing to pay me!

Radio plays a huge part

David recognises that radio plays a huge part in the lives of people who are blind or vision impaired and he pondered whether his love of radio stems from how well the medium works for people who live with sight loss.

He said: "That's a really interesting one. In my head, it never played a major part in it. However, I do see within the visually impaired community, radio does seem to be quite a big thing, relative to the general population, if I can call them that. "It's a tough one to say, but it's a really



David Redmond in Studio.

interesting one to look at because it's a very popular medium in the visually impaired community because it's audio and we can enjoy it in a way that we can't enjoy a lot of television or Netflix, for example."

David is already active in shaping his fledgling career with his website Radio Land and his entertainment-focused Twitter account Media Beat. He is using both mediums to beef up his skills which he hopes to carry with him into the jobs market.

NCBI provided help with employment queries

David explained: "I'm learning new bits and pieces with NCBI as time goes on, and in the last few weeks the NCBI have given me assistance with employment related stuff".

Continued on page 14.

Continued from page 13.

For example, I had to do an exam which required a scribe and the NCBI helped organise that. So just little bits and pieces throughout the years.”

Aside from his career, David has been very active within NCBI as he availed of several services throughout the years, and he is also active in his Local Advocacy Network in Cork. He highlighted the work of the Local Advocacy Networks around Ireland as so important in facilitating civilised conversation and debate about how best to fix accessibility issues for people who are blind or vision impaired.

“I’m not somebody who necessarily sees myself as a strong advocate,” David explained, “I much prefer to assist people who are advocating as opposed to advocating myself”.

You get to meet some fantastic people!

“But what I’ve learned through the Advocacy Network, there’s a lot of things and techniques in chairing meetings, for example. Little things like that, that you’ll take forward into the workplace. You get to meet some fantastic people through it as well, who both work for NCBI as an organisation and also other service users.

“Most of my family have a visual impairment, so I’m in a unique position where everybody who’s around me for the most part gets visual impairment. But it’s still great to get perspectives on different things. What are things like in west Cork? What are things like in Kerry? Those are experiences that I don’t have. Getting to know people and getting extra skills, even just as a social outlet during the pandemic, that is where doing pieces for the Advocacy Network has



David Redmond.

been beneficial to me.”

There will be more to come from David along with fellow NCBI service user Patrick Hennessey as they take on an audio content project entitled NCBI Live, which is in its very early planning stages.

Explaining the project, David commented: “It’s an exciting little project and hopefully it will provide NCBI service users with a little bit more choice as to how they want to access our content”.

Through his work with NCBI, David is clearly interested in helping his fellow service users and as such he offered words of advice to anybody who is dealing with newly acquired sight loss.

“Just because you may have lost something, and it is a loss, there are solutions to a lot of things – you can still do so much,” he advised. “Try and look at different solutions to different things and that will take time to accept but getting yourself onto that path and talking to people, that would be the healthiest thing initially.”

DJ Grimes Bucket List

DJ Grimes, who is 11, is already becoming a national superstar! He was born with a rare syndrome called Bardet Beidl and has had a fair share of battles in his life. DJ underwent numerous operations and, in the process, the young man learned that this eyesight will continue to deteriorate as he gets older. At this time, DJ only has his central vision and as time passes his remaining vision could potentially leave him.

Brave DJ is taking this all in his stride and together with his mum Caroline he curated a Bucket List of activities and experiences he wants to do before he loses his sight.

The Limerick native is already ticking entries off his bucket list with the help of his family, friends, and some famous faces. They range from a tour of a cockpit, meeting Donnacha O'Callaghan, riding in an ambulance and even writing a book, which David Walliams has agreed to assist with. NCBI wishes DJ all the best in completing his bucket list and we are grateful to him for any donations which come to NCBI because of the great experience he's had with our Children and Young Person team.



A delighted DJ Grimes chalked one off his bucket list when he met rugby and TV star Donnacha O'Callaghan.

Sign up to our popular weekly Eye Can Lottery

Monthly entry costs start from €8.80. You will be in with a chance to win a weekly prize of €200!
All funds raised go directly to providing NCBI's life-changing services to people who are blind or vision impaired.



To play, log onto www.ncbi.ie/supporting-us/play-lottery/ or speak to one of the fundraising team **01 8821972**. Results are published weekly on <https://www.ncbi.ie/supporting-us/play-lottery/lottery-results/> and the winners are contacted directly. — **All players must be over 18 years.**

Move into the Light



Celebrate brighter times ahead.

Move into the Light is a campaign to celebrate brighter times ahead with NCBI and we want you to join us

Choose a 30min activity and do it for 30 days during the month of March. Start your activity challenge for a 30 day duration. The brightness of Irish Summertime happens on Sunday 27th March.

1. Do it in memory of someone you love who has recently passed.
2. Do it for yourself and your own health & wellness.
3. Do it for those living with sight loss.

Walk, Run, Cycle, Swim, or exercise in any way you decide for 30 minutes each day.

Registration is FREE and participants will receive a free NCBI t-shirt

Participants will have the opportunity to make a voluntary donation or to launch their own community fundraiser.

For more info visit:

<https://ncbi.ie/event/move-into-the-light/>

and to find our more call Joanne 01 8821970 or email fundraising@ncbi.ie

All Proceeds to NCBI Registered Charity 12673


NCBI
**Working for People
with Sight Loss**

NCBI Capel Street shop



NCBI's CEO Chris White (third from left) and NCBI's Head of Retail, Beverly Scallan (third from right) with the Capel Street team at the opening of the new NCBI Retail shop at 161 Capel Street, Dublin.

NCBI's newest charity shop opened on Capel Street in Dublin 1 on December 15. There was plenty of excitement when we launched our newest shop, which is home to some stunning pre-loved clothing, fabulous homeware items and much more. NCBI CEO, Chris White, was joined by NCBI Head of Retail, Beverley Scallan, and the team working at Capel Street, to officially cut the opening ribbon.

If you get a chance to pop down to Capel Street, you will notice a very new look and feel and it helps to make your shopping experience all the more enjoyable. As the operation at Capel Street continues in its stride, there is also the opportunity to drop in a donation or two if you're in the area. The more items you donate the better! All funds raised from selling donated items goes directly to providing our front line

services and supports for people who are blind or vision impaired.

Also, NCBI's shops play a vital role in promoting sustainability and an alternative to fast fashion. So by shopping with NCBI you not only help someone who is blind or vision impaired to live more independently but you also help save the planet.

Make sure to come in and say hello to us in Capel Street if you're in the area!

If you are interested in volunteering in any NCBI charity shop around Ireland there are several ways to make contact and find out more information. You can visit your nearest store and enquire about opportunities. Alternatively, you can also visit the NCBI website for more information or contact shopvolunteer@ncbi.ie.

Shops — Team Member of the Quarter

Last year, NCBI Retail launched a new initiative — Team Member of the Quarter — to reward and recognise the amazing work and dedication of our team across our 126 stores in Ireland.

In the last two weeks of each quarter, store teams can nominate a team mate, providing touching reasons for their picks. A winner is chosen by area managers and they are awarded a lovely framed certificate and a gift voucher.



Some of Q4's winners were:

Clare Nutley – Volunteer, Portumna, Area 7 Winner

'Clare is always the first person to offer to cover extra shifts if we are short staffed. She is kind, considerate and very thoughtful. She has a heart of gold and always makes a coffee at

10.30am! I would be lost without her and she is a real team player and would do anything she could do to help.' — Lisa, Store Manager.

Maude Williams – Volunteer, Walkinstown, Area 3 Winner

'Maude works every Wednesday and has never missed work. She's with me on every fundraiser we do for NCBI and is always on standby if we are short staffed or need a chat and a cuppa. She comes in every Wednesday and brings fun, excitement, experience and she loves a bit of banter with the customers. She also loves a cloth and a bottle of bleach! You won't



meet a harder worker than Maude. Over the Christmas period Maude lost her best friend with whom she spent a lot of her spare time. We were and are here for her. What stood out most for me is after everything, she still came to the shop. This lady is quite special and it's an honour to have her work with us.' — Tracey, Store Manager.

Talking Technology with NCBI Labs Podcasts

Live Event Podcasts returned in 2022 with a brand new name. We are delighted to be able to bring you more live events under our new banner: Talking Technology with NCBI Labs.

Launched in March last year and with over 60 podcasts recorded to date, show content ranges from lively and engaging chats and debates about the latest inclusive technology, interviews with developers about their latest innovations, interviews with the NCBI Labs team members, in which we learn about them and their jobs.

Seeing It Your Way interviews

Our live events have also covered topics such as tech tips, and Seeing It Your Way interviews where we speak with NCBI service users about how technology has enabled them by breaking down barriers, levelled the playing fields, and allowed them to live independently.

We have met with the creators and developers of certain technologies which have changed the landscape for people who are blind or vision impaired, such as Saqib Sheikh who is the founder of Seeing AI; Glen Gordon, key architect behind JAWS and Hans Wiberg, creator of Be My Eyes. We have also talked to popular YouTube figures such as Sam Seavey of The Blind Life and even a NASA technician! You can listen to the Talking Technology with

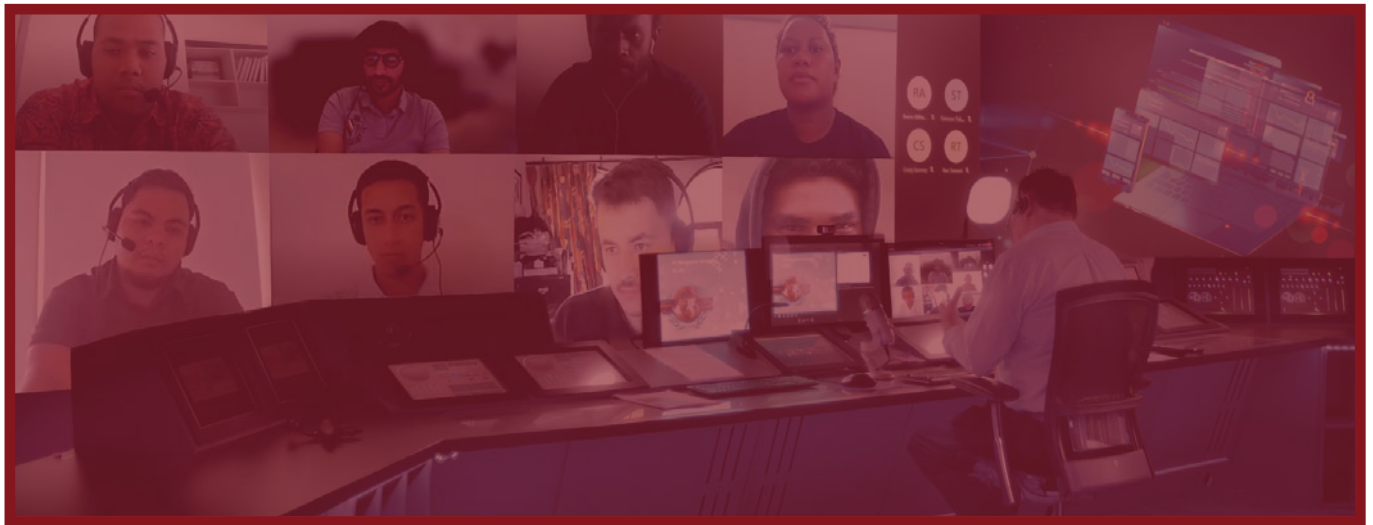


NCBI Labs Podcasts live every second Tuesday at 2.30pm. Details on what's coming up in the next show and a link to join are available in the NCBI Labs Technology Newsletter and on the NCBI website.

NCBI YouTube Channel

You can catch up on all previous shows on Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify Podcasts, as well as the NCBI YouTube Channel. If you have an Amazon Echo or Google Nest smart speaker you can simply say "Alexa" or "Hey Google", "Play NCBI Labs Podcasts" to listen back to previous recordings.

NCBI Labs Virtual Training Courses



Level 1 Uncontracted Braille Course

Duration: 10 weeks

This 10-week course will introduce you to the Unified English Braille uncontracted code. You'll learn to read and write the letters of the alphabet and numbers and you'll develop an awareness of the broader English Braille code. The course is run virtually with one practical session.

Level 1 Smart Speaker Course (Alexa)

Duration: 90 minutes

In this course we explore the range of Amazon Echo smart speakers available and how they can be used to help people who are blind or vision impaired. We cover creating timers, reminders, setting alarms, shopping lists, and initiating information searches by speaking to your device.

Level 1 iPad Course

Duration: 90 minutes

Every iPad has numerous built-in accessibility options that enables anyone with a visual impairment to use the device independently.

These include the ability to speak to your device to request information, use of magnification and speech output to help read information displayed. If you would like to find out more, the Level 1 iPad Course is the perfect place to start.

Level 1 NVDA Course

Duration: 90 minutes

NVDA is a free screen reader for Microsoft Windows that is now used in over 120 countries and has been translated into more than 50 languages. Using the power of NVDA means that people with sight loss can continue to be active members of the digital society.

Level 1 Touch Typing Course

Duration: 90 minutes

This Level 1 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.

If you would like to take part in these courses, future courses, or more advanced training, please email labs@ncbi.ie.

Introducing the BlindShell Classic 2 Talking Mobile Phone

By IT Trainer Daniel Dunne

Following on from their hugely successful Original BlindShell Classic phone the Czech company BlindShell have just released their Classic 2 model. This newer model is a complete redesign of the physical phone from the ground up but retains a very similar software interface that users have grown to love.

Firstly, focusing in on the hardware re-designs, the look and feel of the fondly remembered Nokia design, evident in the original BlindShell Classic, is largely retired in favour of a newer layout.

It's a solid build of a phone with a thicker dimension to accommodate a larger battery and some new technology. For us, one of the important changes is the charging port, which is now a more universal USB-C port. USB-C allows you to connect either way round, so no more trying to guess the correct way to line up the charging tip of the cable!

The second physical change to the phone is the layout of the physical buttons and the addition of side buttons to the device. Gone is the central navigation pad and this has been replaced with single solid tactile buttons that are a more favourable for those of us with, let's say, bigger thumbs! The volume keys are moved to the left side of the phone, while there is a single programmable button that can launch your



favourite App or can be long-pressed to activate the familiar voice-control feature, down the right side.

The top-left action button brings you to a newly added notifications centre which highlights messages received, missed calls, current date and time, battery status, Wi-Fi/4G status, battery level and Bluetooth status. The top-right action button is another dot-shaped button in the first row of keypad buttons, which can be pressed to repeat the last utterance or long pressed to spell the last utterance.

Continued on page 22.

Continued from page 21.

The two line-shaped buttons on the top of the keypad are your up and down navigation keys, replacing the old navigation pad. The green answer call button and the red end call button both have been re-designed and are more tactile. The red end call button is still used to power-on the phone, while powering off the phone is still controlled from within the menu.

BlindShell has retained the 3.5 millimetre headphone jack

Finally, it's worth mentioning that BlindShell has retained the 3.5 millimetre headphone jack, the SOS rear button and have added an LED flashlight to the top of the phone. They also have added NFC which is a technology used to communicate with tag objects – NFC stickers which can be used on objects to identify them with an audio pre-recording. In addition, BlindShell have introduced new tile tags called beepers - similar to the Apple AirTags. These beepers are useful for attaching to objects, like a set of keys or a rucksack, for assistance in locating the items.

The software is by-and-large quite similar and familiar to the original model

So, after that whistle-stop tour of the hardware, physical changes and additions to the BlindShell Classic 2 over the original model, we now look at the software – what happens when you power on the phone and use it. The software is by-and-large quite similar and familiar to the original model which is good for folks who like to upgrade to the latest models as they get released.

One slight change though is the new home screen. Instead of being brought to the first item on the menu, you are presented with a large time display, a Wi-Fi indicator, and a battery indicator. You will notice that the announcements are louder, owing to a larger speaker in the phone.

Additions to the software of the phone include internet browser, vision aids (for working with beepers), magnifier, NFC sticker tags and App Catalogue. WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Telegram are highly popular apps are available here.

Link by Bluetooth to hearing aids

We sometimes tend to forget what a phone is used for... phone calls! The quality of calls is improved with clearer audio and it has the ability for the device to link by Bluetooth to hearing aids, headphones and speakers. As the phone is shipped SIM card free you can pop in a SIM from any of the Irish mobile carriers to get up and running.

Overall, we conclude that the BlindShell Classic 2 is a very good device with good improvements over its predecessor. Is it worth the upgrade though? It is for those who would like to avail of the new apps and hardware available. However, if calls and texts are your thing, the original BlindShell Classic remains an excellent choice.

To purchase a BlindShell 2 phone or to arrange a demonstration please email labs@ncbi.ie or call 1800 911 110. You can also visit the NCBI Online Store.

Amazon adds a male voice option to its smart speakers

The use of smart speakers are becoming more and more common at home, in the workplace and beyond as each day passes.

As we all buy into the smart speaker lifestyle, the people behind what we can and can't do on them are constantly updating the features available.

For those of us who are familiar with Amazon's range of speakers, we will be used to hearing Alexa speak back to us exclusively in a female voice. Well not anymore!

For the first time since Alexa's introduction in 2013, Amazon has added a new option to equip your smart speaker with a male voice and the function is now finally available in Ireland.

Just say: "Alexa, change your voice". Alexa will respond by saying: "OK, you're all set. I will be the voice you hear when you wake me up". It will be interesting to hear which voice people prefer. For those who use Alexa to read your Kindle books aloud, the female voice version will remain the only option available.

The ability to change the voice adds to other great features like Whisper Mode and Brief Mode.



Whisper Mode

To enable Whisper Mode just say "Alexa, enable whisper mode" or whisper to the device and it will recognise you are whispering, and it will whisper back to you. Whisper Mode might be useful if you are trying to keep the noise down – perfect for when you're trying to keep your baby asleep!

Brief Mode

Just say "Alexa, enable brief mode" and Alexa will reduce its spoken responses to you. For example, if you ask Alexa to turn off the sitting room light, instead of telling you the light has been turned off, it will respond with a discreet audible tone.



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**