

Need to Talk

Issue 5

Newsletter

Having someone who understands what you're going through makes a difference

If you or a loved one are experiencing sight loss, having someone who understands what you're going through can make a huge difference. During these times, many people find it helpful to talk through their feelings with someone outside their circle of family and friends.

Through the Need to Talk (NTT) project, sight loss charities RNIB (in Scotland and Northern Ireland) and Fighting Blindness (Republic of Ireland) are working together to support people of all ages, as well as family and friends, to access the emotional and practical support they need to adapt to life with sight loss.

Although the project is working across the three regions, there is a specific focus on providing support to those living in more rural areas of western Scotland, Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland, where access to public transport and other support services can be limited.



In this issue:

- As lockdown eases taking care of our mental health is more important than ever
- Our Living Well with Sight Loss Courses go from strength to strength
- Need to Talk launches promotional counselling video across all regions

As lockdown eases taking care of our mental health is more important than ever



I don't think any of us could have fully understood the impact coronavirus would have on our lives. In many ways, in full lockdown, life was simpler. At least then, we had clear instructions on what we had to do. Coming out of lockdown, while progress is welcome, can also be confusing and scary - especially if you have sight loss.

The Need to Talk project has been running throughout the pandemic and it continues to adapt to give blind and partially sighted people the help they need. Through our Mental Wellbeing Check-ins, we have been aware of the journeys people have been on and the challenges that many of them have faced in the last year. We also know that - even after difficult times - we can experience all the feelings and feel the full impact of our recent experiences. They can come to the surface and make us feel a bit low. So, while we are happy to get our lives back, there is also the risk to our mental health.

So, how have we been helping and what are we able to support people with?

Mental Wellbeing Check-ins

One-off sessions to check in on what's going on and adjust any strategies to help you manage during these uncertain times. You don't have to be on the edge to make use of these; in fact, we encourage you to use this service to give yourself a good mental health check at any point when it might help.

Counselling

An opportunity to talk to a qualified counsellor for eight sessions. You can explore an issue to do with your sight loss and how it is affecting you.

Living Well with Sight Loss Courses

As well as the standard Living Well with Sight Loss courses, we also run bespoke courses focusing on current government coronavirus guidance and how this impacts on someone with sight loss.

Whatever you need at this time of change and disruption, please be assured, RNIB, Fighting Blindness and the Need to Talk Team are here for you.



Amanda Hawkins
Specialist Lead for
Counselling and
Wellbeing, Need to
Talk Project Lead

Our Living Well with Sight Loss Courses go from strength to strength

Our Living Well with Sight Loss courses provide practical and emotional support to help you face the future with confidence. As well as providing an opportunity for people with sight loss to connect with each other, family and friends are also invited to join and participate. The courses are usually delivered face-to-face but, due to the coronavirus pandemic, the sessions are currently being held online.

As we moved into 2021 and with local lockdowns still in place across areas covered by the project, online courses continue to be our main way to reach beneficiaries. Within the past five months, five courses have taken place in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland.

Richard Craig, a Confidence Building Coordinator for the Need to Talk project who has been delivering these online courses, said: "We have seen steady demand in the past year for the online confidence building courses by people with sight loss residing within the project areas.

"For some it can feel quite daunting - engaging with other people over the internet using a camera and microphone - but we have found that if a person can join the group at the first session, most participants thereafter experience few technical difficulties and go on to attend the majority of the six week course.

"The coronavirus pandemic has seen an increase in rural and social isolation among people with sight loss in our project areas and we are grateful to continue to be able to help and support

people within the comforts of their own homes using our online courses."

Patricia's story: How Need to Talk helped me

Patricia Casement from Downpatrick, Northern Ireland, recently took part in RNIB's Living Well with Sight Loss course. She wanted to find out how she could help her mother, whose sight had deteriorated significantly due to macular degeneration.

Patricia explains: "We noticed dad was taking on more and more, and mum's mood was low from struggling with things like reading the newspaper, something that really gave her a sense of connection with her community. Especially throughout the pandemic during which they've been shielding.

"Being a registered nurse involved with home care provision, I need to keep up to date with any best practice and what could help my service users. And mum not being confident in getting online to attend the course herself, I thought it would be good to go along and see



what we were missing that might help her do what she wanted to do and keep getting enjoyment out of life.

She adds: "The course was fantastic. I couldn't recommend it enough - to family members and even healthcare professionals - anyone supporting someone with sight loss. It was really relaxed and welcoming.

"I found out about the literally thousands of products available – from different coloured mats to put under particular objects like a glass to make them easier to find on the table, to large magnifiers with a light which mum now uses to read the newspaper again!

"The technology session was great. I even learnt a few things myself such as all the different accessibility settings on most phones that can make a big difference, even just in enlarging text on screen or using your phone camera

to magnify things like information on packaging. RNIB's free counselling service is also something I'll certainly keep in mind, especially for other clients out in the community."

Patricia says that following the course, her mother's mood and outlook has really changed: "She's much more realistic than pessimistic now, with a refreshed approach to life.

"One of the biggest things that's helped is now we're talking about her sight loss. It's not this hidden thing. She's come to a place of acceptance - armed with more knowledge about all the different things that can be of help - that her sight loss doesn't have to compromise her life, that she can still have a fun, fulfilling life.

"We're looking forward to further travels and adventures together again and hopefully she'll get involved in more things to keep connected with others."

Need to Talk launches promotional counselling video across all regions

In May 2021, during Mental Health Awareness Week, we launched a new social media campaign across RNIB's channels in Northern Ireland and Scotland to promote Need to Talk's counselling service. The campaign was spearheaded with a short video where some of our Need to Talk counsellors explained how the service works and how to get in touch. The aim is to boost enquiries and referrals to the service.

Earlier in the spring, in the Republic of Ireland, we shared the new Need to Talk video via the Fighting Blindness

website and social media platforms. Across the six border counties the video reached 5,800 people and was watched 2,732 times. The video was most popular with women aged 65 and over. We also promoted our video content as a paid advert on the Fighting Blindness Instagram channel. It reached 25,370 people this way and recorded more than 62,000 impressions. It's estimated that 1,050 people will recall the advert if asked two days after seeing it. On Instagram, our audience was predominantly young men aged 18-34.

Need to Talk is a five-year project delivered through a partnership between RNIB in Northern Ireland and Scotland, and Fighting Blindness in the Republic of Ireland. The project is supported by the European Union's INTERREG VA Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

All aspects of Need to Talk's counselling services and Living with Sight Loss courses are provided free of charge.

For more information please visit: rnib.org.uk/needtotalk

Get in touch

You can get in touch with Need to Talk's counselling and Living with Sight Loss team by telephoning or emailing RNIB or Fighting Blindness.

RNIB

Phone: 0303 123 9999

Email: needtotalk@rnib.org.uk

rnib.org.uk

Fighting Blindness

Phone: +353 1 6789 004

Email: info@fightingblindness.ie

fightingblindness.ie