

# Need to Talk

Issue 3

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 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:

- **Living with Sight Loss course in Enniskillen**
- **Interview with Dr Hazel McFarlane**
- **INTERREG VA programme in Edinburgh**
- **Need to Talk in Paisley (pictured)**

# Introduction



The NTT newsletter tends to be a retrospective look at the work we have done to date but as we are living in a different world altogether at the moment, it would seem remiss of me

not to mention how we have adapted the programme to meet the needs of the community whilst we battle the additional worry and isolation that COVID-19 has introduced to our lives.

As the demand and worry around supermarket delivery slots has started to subside, sight loss charity RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) has said that the need for emotional support has never been greater.

RNIB's Helpline has received a surge in calls relating to mental and emotional support and in response, Need to Talk – a counselling and confidence building service from RNIB and Fighting Blindness in the Republic of Ireland, has introduced Emergency Mental Health Sessions to offer crucial emotional and mental support for blind and partially sighted people during this time. This is essentially an emotional support triage service for blind and partially sighted people in lockdown. It isn't counselling, it's a platform for people to talk to someone about their fears and worries right now, whether that's around their eye health, feeling isolated or any other lockdown-related anxiety they may be experiencing.

Following the announcement that lockdown will last for the foreseeable future, feelings of loneliness and isolation are being experienced by blind and partially sighted people with many

admitting to feeling stressed, worried and anxious amidst the coronavirus lockdown.

With many people with sight loss already reporting issues with isolation, we think that the impact of coronavirus increases this sense – perhaps removing the ability to connect with people on a regular basis. When we feel isolated, feelings of worries and anxiety have a tendency to grow and become stronger in our lives and this can affect how we are feeling about ourselves. The Emergency Mental Health Sessions are here to talk about some of the issues that are affecting people and making them feel low. These might include; fear of leaving the house, worries about access to food, fears of dying alone, being anxious about normal life – it's generally where our fears start to consume us. RNIB is offering these emergency mental health slots in the UK and partner sight loss charity Fighting Blindness is offering them in the Republic of Ireland.

Further good news is that Need to Talk is also sourcing additional assistance from external counsellors they have trained over the duration of the project, so that the counselling needs of blind and partially sighted people can be met faster during this period.

The fact that the service was always online or over the phone, means it is already equipped to continue providing counselling in this way. We have been very lucky that we have been delivering online and via the phone, so we switched without issue as COVID-19 impacted.

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**Amanda Hawkins**  
Specialist Lead, Emotional Support  
Sight Loss Counselling Team

# Building Your Confidence

## – Sight Loss Course in Enniskillen

Richard Craig, a Confidence Building Coordinator for the Need to Talk project, recently ran a Living with Sight Loss course in Enniskillen in County Fermanagh.

Richard said: "The project is pleased to have delivered its second Living with Sight Loss course in Enniskillen following our first ever course delivered on the project here back in late 2017.

"Again, the turnout from beneficiaries was high along with strong support from local organisations who attended and delivered talks. We look forward to delivering another course in the near future".

The course, which involved four sessions spread out over a month, was created to help people deal with issues surrounding sight loss; including feelings of fear, loneliness and anxiety about the future.

Thirteen people with sight loss attended the course which focused on a range of themes; including mobility and daily living, emotional support and wellbeing, assistive technology, eye health, peer support and leisure time.

As well as providing an opportunity for people with sight loss to meet and connect with each other, family and friends were also invited to attend the course.

Allison Place from Enniskillen, who has the eye condition keratoconus, attended the course after being contacted by Richard Craig.

She said: "This is the first time I have been in a group like this. For me I think



being with people that also have sight loss was definitely beneficial. Whereas before, in work, being with people who didn't have sight loss, I felt left out.

"You don't realise the fear that people have so it helped me to talk to like-minded people.

"I also had some referrals from Sensory Support who gave me a light with a magnifier to help me read. Home Safety also came to my house to take a look around and recommend things for safety.

**"All the talks at the course helped me especially the benefits talk."**

"It helped my confidence and helped me realise there are people the same as me. I think talking to people around me, I felt I wasn't alone".

For more information on our Living with Sight Loss courses please go to the following link to our Need to Talk Project webpage: [www.rnib.org.uk/needtotalk](http://www.rnib.org.uk/needtotalk).

On this page, you will find a video which will give you an idea of what to expect from the course. You can also hear from people who have successfully completed the course.



# Online Training

## Build your confidence online

Need to Talk also offers a free eLearning Living with Sight Loss course to rebuild confidence and support people in learning new skills to help deal with sight loss.

The online course is delivered in two parts; eye health and confidence building. In both parts you'll have the opportunity to explore a range of topics covering eye health, emotional support, technology, benefits, daily living and leisure.

And because it's online, you can take the course at any time and any pace. This course can also be of huge benefit to the family and friends of people living with sight loss, as sight issues affect all aspects of a person's life – including those closest to them.

This course is available in Northern Ireland, the border counties of the Republic of Ireland and western Scotland.

To register and begin this course, please visit: [rnib.org.uk/needtotalk](http://rnib.org.uk/needtotalk)

For further information or support in accessing this course, please contact the Need to Talk Team on **0303 123 9999**, or [rnib.org.uk/needtotalk](http://rnib.org.uk/needtotalk)

# 97

**people accessed Need to Talk confidence building courses this year.**

# 174

**people accessed counselling service in Northern Ireland. This is followed by 42 in the border counties and 36 in Western Scotland. You will receive eight to ten sessions of counselling over the phone at a time that is convenient to you.**



# Telephone Counselling Service

## Telephone Counselling Service – Interview with Dr Hazel McFarlane

A free telephone counselling service for people in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Ireland who are experiencing sight loss, has been endorsed by Dr Hazel McFarlane – a Scotswoman recently voted one of the 100 Most Influential Disabled People in the UK.

Hazel, who was partially sighted in childhood and became completely blind later in life, said the Need to Talk service fills a vital role in providing the support people often need when first diagnosed with a sight condition.

“Sight is the sense that most people fear losing most,” Hazel said, “You wonder about yourself, your family, your job, what sort of life you will still be able to lead.

“The Need to Talk counsellors are trained to offer the emotional help and reassurance to help people to find their lives again and maximise their independence. It’s great that help is just a phone call away.”



# INTERREG VA Exhibition



**Seamus Sheedy, Project Manager of our Need to Talk service, and Miguel Wiggan, Scottish counsellor, recently attended the INTERREG VA exhibition at Edinburgh’s Dynamic Earth Centre.**

“The purpose of the event was to raise awareness of the impact that the INTERREG VA programme is having in western Scotland,” said Seamus.

“It was a great opportunity to reflect upon the cross-border partnerships within each project.

“Need to Talk, which partners with Fighting Blindness in Ireland, offers free counselling and Living with Sight Loss courses for people with sight loss in Dumfries and Galloway, Ayrshire, Arran and Cumbrae, Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh, Argyllshire and Bute and the Western Isles.

## Volunteer Training with Peter O'Toole

In January, through a collaboration between RNIB and Vision UK, we ran the first ever Counselling for Sight Loss training in Belfast.

Project Manager for Need to Talk, Peter O'Toole, said: "The training was a great success, one which we hope to repeat again soon. A special thanks must go to the ten counsellors who travelled from near and far to attend; their enthusiasm and dedication was what made the training so positive.

"It is hoped that once our course participants have undertaken the accreditation process that they will utilise their skills in their own practice or even perhaps consider volunteering for RNIB.

"We are also heartened to know that there a number of suitably trained counsellors out in the community that we can direct our service users to, should they wish to engage with them privately."



## Sight Action Inverness

RNIB met with Sight Action Inverness which provides a wide range of help and advice for people who find themselves dealing with sight loss.

Executive Manager, Gillian Mitchell, said: "I am delighted to be working with Need To Talk as it offers a way to give people more control over their lives.

**"Rehabilitation provides appropriate solutions to everyday problems, boosting confidence, maintaining social contact and encouraging them to lead fuller lives. Individual needs are respected and supported."**





# Visit to Scottish War blind Hawkhead Centre in Paisley

## RNIB Workshop for Veterans

The RNIB recently delivered a workshop at the Scottish War Blind Hawkhead Centre in Paisley.

The Centre is for veterans with sight loss, irrespective of cause and is a free activity hub for men and women of all ages.

The following is a list of the support provided;

- Advice on suitable specialist equipment, such as CCTV readers and magnifiers
- Financial assistance to enable veterans to take equipment home
- Cane training, to increase confidence in mobility when out and about
- Practical help on making homes safer for someone with sight loss

There are also a number of activities and classes available including;

- Arts and crafts
- Woodwork
- Getting online
- Cookery
- Sports, such as curling, bowling
- Strength and fitness classes for all levels.

All this specialist support can assist with improving independence and mobility. There is also one-to-one guidance to help veterans in regaining or maintaining confidence after their sight loss.

There are outreach workers based across Scotland, covering all areas – urban and rural. Each visit members in their homes, and offers tailored advice, support and signposting.



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](http://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](mailto:needtotalk@rnib.org.uk)  
[rnib.org.uk](http://rnib.org.uk)

### **Fighting Blindness**

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