Focus on our work
RNIB Northern Ireland annual review 2010/11
Your audio CD

- Hear highlights of our work
- Listen to stories of people we’ve helped
- Find out what motivates our supporters

Focus on our work

RNIB Northern Ireland
annual review 2010/11 – Audio CD

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Introduction

There is no doubt that this has been a very tough year across the charity sector. This makes us even more proud of some of our amazing achievements during the year, but along the way we have had to make some hard decisions. These decisions have been made with our overall vision and the needs of blind and partially sighted people at the forefront of our mind. Through the services and campaigning of RNIB Northern Ireland, we remain totally committed to delivering our group strategy: stopping so many people losing their sight unnecessarily; making sure the needs of people are better met at the point of diagnosis; supporting people who have lost their sight to lead full and independent lives; improving the support available to people with sight loss and complex needs; and influencing service providers, industries and government to make the world a better place for people with sight problems.

Although it has been a challenging year and we are preparing ourselves for an even more challenging time ahead, we have still managed some remarkable successes, which we celebrate in this review.

It is now more important than ever that we continue to provide the services that are so vital to the lives of so many people, such as our information and membership services, giving people with sight problems the support and advice they need.

“We continued to develop new and innovative solutions to improve peoples’ lives, such as our work with Goodmans to...
develop the first talking set top box which will enable people with sight problems to more easily reap the benefits of digital television. The “Smart Talk” set top box is now available and in February 2011 won a Which? “Best Buy” award.

11 April 2011 was a landmark day for blind people. It was the culmination of more than four years of some of our most successful campaigning, which led to people with a severe visual impairment becoming eligible for the higher rate mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance (DLA). This meant that around 23,000 people across the UK would now be eligible for more than £30 a week extra to help them cope with the additional costs of living with sight loss.

But unfortunately now is not the time to sit back and celebrate our success. The Welfare Reform Bill currently going through Parliament and the cuts to local authority services will, if they remain unamended, have a devastating impact on the lives of many blind and partially sighted people.

A reduction in out-of-work support will make it harder for people to find employment, and restrictions in access to sight saving treatments could mean people losing their sight unnecessarily. As we set out on 2011/12 we are absolutely determined to do all we can to influence a change of direction and minimise the impact these reforms could potentially have. The large reductions in local authority spending budgets will also have a negative impact on the services we are able to provide.
Introduction

This year we celebrated the 75th year of our Talking Book Service. This vital service enables people to carry on reading when they have lost their sight. Many of the 38,000 subscribers have their subscriptions to the service subsidised by their local authority. But this by no means covers the full cost to us of providing the service, and without this we will find it difficult to continue providing the service to blind and partially sighted people in the way we are currently able to. Frighteningly we are already seeing signs of local authorities withdrawing this support.

We are tremendously proud of the fact that our fundraising income has held up well this year and because of downward trends in local authority spending, it is going to become more and more important in the years to come.

We would like to end by saying thank you. None of our campaigning successes or the vital services we run would be possible without the fantastic contribution of our volunteers, donors and staff. Thank you for your vital support – it really does make a huge and lasting difference to the lives of blind and partially sighted people across Northern Ireland.

Richard Moore
Chair

Charlie Mack
Director
Stopping people losing their sight unnecessarily

It’s a shocking fact that around 50 per cent of the people with a sight problem in Northern Ireland have an eye condition that could have been avoided through early detection or the correct treatment. This is why we work so hard to bring an end to people losing their sight unnecessarily.

Many sight threatening eye conditions can be avoided simply by having a regular eye test. If an eye condition is detected early enough, it is more likely it will be possible to treat it successfully.

The Vision Strategy (Northern Ireland) has the support of key NI executive departments alongside optometrists, health sector managers and other charities as well as the All Party Assembly Group on Visual Impairment at Stormont. With an ageing population, the numbers of people affected by sight loss in Northern Ireland are set to increase significantly from the current estimate of 48,000.

Now in its second year, the Vision Strategy has an ambitious series of priority action plans covering prevention of sight loss, maximising independence and improving educational attainment and levels of employment.

Also in the community we launched “Eyes right” this year. This sight screening tool enables communities to take the first step in managing their own eye health and will help potentially sight threatening eye conditions to be identified at a stage when they can be successfully treated.
Stopping people losing their sight unnecessarily

It is hard to imagine how frustrating it would feel to be diagnosed with an eye condition, and to know something could be done to save your sight, but that this treatment was not available to you. We have supported a number of people across Northern Ireland to challenge their health service and receive the treatment that is best for them.

When people want to know more they can contact our eye health information service directly. This year we gave one-to-one support and advice to almost 3,000 people in Northern Ireland, helping them to better understand their eye condition.

RNIB distributed over 190,000 leaflets on the most common causes of sight loss, and the pages on our website which contain information on a wide range of eye conditions were viewed over three quarters of a million times during the year. This information is often all people have to help them understand their eye condition and their future.

This year we also helped an awful lot of people find out more about the eye condition they had been diagnosed with. RNIB distributed over 190,000 leaflets on the most common causes of sight loss, and

48,000 people are affected by sight loss in Northern Ireland

190,000 leaflets about eye conditions sent out

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Gerard’s story

Gerard Lawler was the House Manager at the Belfast Grand Opera House when he was diagnosed with diabetic retinopathy. Gerard’s condition had a major impact on his life and he found it hard to cope. The Eye Clinic Liaison Officer (ECLO) supported him through those early days.

“Susan Caskey was the ECLO working at the hospital that day. I’ll never forget, as we walked into the room to have a chat, she told me how she herself had diabetes and had had operations on her eyes too. It was like a massive weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I think knowing that I wasn’t in this alone anymore was the key for me. There was support to help me and hold my hand through it.”
Supporting independent living

Most people feel more afraid of losing their sight than any other sense. This is because of the perceived, and often very real, impact sight loss can have on your independence. We are absolutely determined to do all we can to help people maintain their independence, and lead a full and enjoyable life.

When you are diagnosed with a sight problem you are going to worry how the rest of your life will turn out. You are going to start to think about all those things you take for granted that will suddenly become more difficult. It is vitally important that we help people deal with these initial worries about their future as soon after diagnosis as possible. But in the past, support at the point of diagnosis has rarely been there. That is why we have put so much effort into the development and implementation of the Eye Clinic Liaison Officer (ECLO) role in eye clinics.

Northern Ireland Health Minister Michael McGimpsey highlighted the importance of early diagnosis for people with serious eye conditions after a visit to the eye clinic at Belfast’s Royal Victoria Hospital. The Minister praised the work of the RNIB ECLO, describing it as, “An excellent example of how skills and experience in the voluntary sector can work in partnership with the health service to improve the quality of services received by patients.”

This year ECLOs were there for 2,899 people in Northern Ireland at the point they were diagnosed, enabling them to more easily access the support and services they need now and in the future to maintain their independence.

2,899 people in Northern Ireland received support from our ECLOs.
Diane’s story

Diane Marks was 24 years old when she lost her sight 14 years ago due to meningitis and was left completely blind with no light perception at all. Prior to this she had always had her nose in a book and one of her biggest frustrations on losing her sight was not being able to just pick up a book and read.

“The Talking Book Service is a phenomenal way to keep up with the sighted population in terms of reading. I would be distraught if talking books were no longer available. The range of books I receive from RNIB is just incredible.”
“Losing my sight was something that happened to me overnight and was the most scary thing I’ve ever gone through in my life. I didn’t know what to do, or how to move on with my life.”

But Lisa’s life changed when she got involved in Eye Matter’s confidence-building programme last year.

“Getting involved with Eye Matter opened up opportunities for me to do training and to meet people who had gone through similar experiences as me. Suddenly I realised that I wasn’t alone and my life did have a future after all.”
Maintaining that independence often means doing things in a slightly different way to the way you may have done them before losing your sight. This is where our range of specially designed products helps to make life that little bit easier for blind and partially sighted people. This year we sold over 400,000 products. This included new products such as the “PenFriend”, a labelling device that can be used to identify items around the home, as well as products that have been helping people for years such as the liquid level indicator, which can help someone make a cup of tea.

In November we celebrated the 75th anniversary of our Talking Book Service which has provided a vital reading service to blind and partially sighted people since it began. Last year we sent out over 1.7 million books to our 38,000 subscribers.

Sound Vision Ulster is a locally produced bi-monthly audio magazine. It provides information and entertainment for blind and partially sighted people across Northern Ireland and beyond. The current circulation is over 2,000 and includes professionals and politicians.

This year our information and membership services dealt with over 450,000 enquiries, giving information, support and advice to people with sight problems, and signposting invaluable services and other organisations that are there to help them.

Eye Matter, RNIB Northern Ireland’s Young Persons Forum, launched “A guide to independent living” on audio CD for young people aged 15 to 30. The CD includes useful hints and tips and information about how to become and remain as independent as possible.
Supporting independent living

If you are of working age when you lose your sight, you are likely to worry about keeping your job. A staggering 66 per cent of blind and partially sighted people of working age are not in employment. This year we worked with existing and potential employers to help 78 people retain their job when losing their sight, or find new work.

This year we launched an innovative cross-border project to improve the lives of hundreds of people with hearing and sight loss. The Sensory Engagement Programme brings together four organisations that support deaf and blind people across Northern Ireland and Ireland. Spearheaded by RNIB NI in partnership with Action on Hearing Loss, the National Council for the Blind of Ireland and Deafhear, the project will deliver a specially designed “active citizenship” programme and provide IT training and confidence building to over 300 people with sight and hearing loss. Funded by the EU’s INTERREG IVA Programme, the project will also develop models of excellence in service delivery within further education colleges, libraries and banks across Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland.

Understanding your rights and entitlements has rarely been as difficult and complex as it is now. We are committed to helping blind and partially sighted people achieve the benefits and services they are entitled to. This year our Helpline’s advice and legal rights teams helped over 26,000 people with in-depth support and advocacy work across the UK. RNIB NI benefits advice workers dealt with 1,707 enquiries helping to identify previously unclaimed entitlements amounting to £1.7million.
Brian’s story

Brian McDonnagh comes from Omagh and is totally blind. He went on a residential weekend at the Gartan Outdoor Education Centre in Donegal in 2010. Brian was introduced to the idea by NCBI’s Marian Lewis, Sensory Engagement Programme (SEP) Project Co-ordinator.

“I went on the weekend away because I heard that there would be information on Apple products and other technology which really interested me. The Gartan Centre was very easy to get around and I could make my own way about without any trouble at all. I enjoyed the fact that I was there sharing this experience with other people in the same boat as myself.”
Archie MacGregor and his family received a great deal of support from RNIB when his son was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa. His son is now thriving at university and Archie has decided to support RNIB by running marathons and raising money to help us continue our work. So far he has run four, and he doesn’t plan to stop there.

“Very simply I just want to give something back. When it is something close to you, you suddenly appreciate the great work people are doing. RNIB needs as much financial support as it can possibly get in these difficult times.”
Creating an inclusive society

We want to make Northern Ireland a better place to live if you are blind or partially sighted by improving travel, shopping and banking experiences, and by developing better ways for people to read, watch television and get the most from technology.

In order to achieve these aims we work with service providers, industry and developers of new technologies to ensure that the needs of people with sight problems are kept in mind as new products and services are developed.

The direction of all this work is shaped by our membership base. At the end of the year 320 people in Northern Ireland were reaping the benefits of membership and receiving special offers, invitations to regional member meetings and our bi-monthly members’ magazine Vision.

There is no doubt that the advent of eBooks holds an enormous amount of potential for blind and partially sighted people. But that is only if they are produced and delivered in a way that is accessible. This year we have influenced manufacturers to increase the availability of text-to-speech features in eBook players, making them usable for people who cannot see the screen. We’ve also worked hard to train blind and partially sighted people in the use of these new technologies, either through our fantastic squad of technology volunteers who visit
Creating an inclusive society

people in their own homes, or through our “Taste the Apple Days” which gave people hands-on training with some of these new devices.

At an event hosted by the Lord Mayor of Belfast, RNIB Northern Ireland celebrated the success of audio description at international football matches at Windsor Park and called for other sports to follow suit.

And on World Sight Day in October 2010 over 65 sports and community professionals attended a training and networking event in Lisnaskea to learn how to include blind and partially sighted people in sport and leisure activity. Run by RNIB in partnership with Sport Northern Ireland and Disability Sports NI, the event provided participants with visual awareness training and guidance on how to make sport and leisure activities more accessible. It also provided a chance for professionals from the three organisations to link together and ensure improved opportunities in the future.

Working with Goodmans we developed the “Smart Talk” set top box, the first fully accessible talking set top box which enables people with sight problems to reap the full benefits of digital TV. And in February this achievement was recognised by Which? magazine who gave the set top box a “Best Buy” award.

65 sports professionals attended our training event
Lisburn in focus story

With a five year target of reaching 5,000 people, visual awareness training is a vital part of the Lisburn in Focus project.

“When I learnt that there are approximately 3,000 people in the Lisburn Council area alone who have a visual impairment it really was imperative that staff receive appropriate training and we ensure our menus are fully accessible.”

Bronagh Campbell, Del Toro Restaurant Manager
Over 65 sports and community professionals attended a training and networking event at the Share Holiday Village in Lisnaskea in October 2010, to learn how to include blind and partially sighted people in sport and leisure activity.

“This has been a fantastic opportunity for coaches to network with blind and partially sighted people and it’s great to see Kelly Gallagher, Paralympic Snow Skier and Len Davies, NI Blind Golfer sharing their experiences with the coaches.”

Kevin O’Neill, Director of DSNI
“The retail experience” was launched this year. The guide helps retailers to improve the shopping experience of people with sight problems. We have also worked with Debenhams to develop a training programme for personal shopper staff at each of their 134 stores throughout the UK and Ireland. The three-day programme helps them understand the issues faced by blind and partially sighted people when they shop and enables them to offer support and advice. As well as helping them to improve their services we made a big splash with the awards to ensure the message got out there to as many service providers as possible - encouraging them to do the same.

We launched our “Lisburn in Focus” project. Funded by the Big Lottery the project aims to make Lisburn a centre of excellence for services which are accessible to blind and partially sighted people. We are working with service providers and businesses to ensure everything they do is accessible to people with sight problems and is a demonstration of best practice to service providers throughout the UK. The Lisburn in Focus team have delivered visual awareness training to almost 3,000 adults and children, increased the amount of accessible information produced in the Lisburn Council area and worked in partnership with other organisations to remove street clutter and obstacles.

And finally, on a campaigning front we started the year celebrating the fact that the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) higher rate mobility component would now be available to around 23,000 people and worked hard to ensure people knew of their increased entitlement.
Debenhams’ story

We were inspired by Gok Wan’s transformation of Di Cram on an episode of TV show “How to Look Good Naked” dedicated to shoppers with sight problems. As a result we worked with Debenhams to train their personal shopping staff how best to help blind and partially sighted shoppers and offer them a free and fantastic personal shopping service at all their stores throughout the UK.

“It’s like the difference between never buying any clothes, and buying clothes and enjoying buying clothes! And somebody goes and finds the clothes for you – it’s like being Princess Anne!”
Elizabeth Cooke, partially sighted Debenhams’ shopper
Sonia had a retinal haemorrhage at the age of 33 and the subsequent scarring left her with little central vision. RNIB helped her to adjust to no longer being able to read or drive. When it came to drawing up her Will, Sonia wanted to leave a legacy to RNIB to ensure others can be helped in the future.

“RNIB bought me my first computer and at college they transcribed any books I needed. RNIB has been really good to me so when I found out they could act as executors for my Will I thought I’d use them and give back some of what they’ve done for me.”
Thank you

We are honoured to have the support of some remarkable individuals. We are indebted to our Patron, HM The Queen and to our President, His Grace the Duke of Westminster as well as to our Vice-Presidents:

Sir John Beckwith CBE
The Rt Hon David Blunkett MP
Richard Brewster
Professor Ian Bruce CBE
Jeremy Bull
Haruhisa Handa
Dr Euclid Herie
Lady Jarvis
Penny Lancaster-Stewart
Lord Low of Dalston CBE
Sir Mike Rake
Dr Dermot Smurfit
Rod Stewart CBE
The Rt Hon the Earl of Stockton
Sir Duncan Watson

We’d like to say a heartfelt thank you to the many individuals, companies and trusts that have supported us this year. Without your support we could not have achieved what we have. We can’t possibly name you all but here’s a list of those who have contributed significantly to our cause.

29th May 1961 Charitable Trust
Alcon and Allergen
Gerry Allen
Milly Apthorp Charitable Trust
Lady Ashcroft
John Atcheson Foundation
Awards for All NI
Ballymoney Ladies Committee
BAND Trust
BBC Children in Need
Belfast Association for the Blind
Belfast Ladies Committee
Big Lottery Fund NI
Blackwater Ramblers
Ms Pattie Boyd
Ann Brown Charitable Trust
Billmeir Charitable Trust
Booker Prize Foundation
Boots D&A
Breakaway Charity
Richard Brewster
British Gas
Brownlie Charitable Trust
Carmen Butler Charteris Charitable Trust
C Charitable Trust
Edward Cadbury Charitable Trust
Clover Trust
Coleraine Inner Wheel
Mr Cyril Dennis MBE
Mrs Lisa Dennis
Eveson Charitable Trust
Hugh Fraser Foundation
Mrs Michéle Freedman
A lasting legacy

Nearly 30 per cent of RNIB’s income comes from legacies. That means £1 in every £3 we spend on providing services and support comes from legacies left by previous generations. We are immensely grateful to all those who have chosen to support us through a gift in their Will. You don’t have to be wealthy to make a difference. Legacies of all sizes play an invaluable role in our work. To find out more call 0845 600 0313 or visit rnib.org.uk/legacy
With support from these people...
...we’ve helped these people find their lives again.

Find out how you can support us. Call 0845 345 0054
A brief look at our finances

During 2010–11, £3,403,000 was spent on services for blind and partially sighted people in Northern Ireland. These services were financed by a service income of £1,618,000 with a deficit of £1,785,000 being met by RNIB’s voluntary income.

In 2010/11 RNIB Northern Ireland focused resources on the following areas of work:

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<tr>
<th>Area of Work</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>Stopping people losing their sight</td>
<td>£181,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting independent living</td>
<td>£2,889,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creating an inclusive society</td>
<td>£326,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Governance costs</td>
<td>£7,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total expenditure</strong></td>
<td><strong>£3,403,000</strong></td>
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These figures are extracted from the full Trustees’ report and financial statement for the year ending 31 March 2011, as audited by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP. If you would like the full report, available in print, audio, braille and email, please contact the Helpline on 0303 123 9999 or helpline@rnib.org.uk