



**THEME:**

Health & Social Care

**FUNDING:**

€1,859,682.92

**MATCH FUNDING:**

Department of Health  
(Northern Ireland and  
Ireland)

**LEAD PARTNER:**

Royal National Institute  
of Blind People North-  
ern Ireland (RNIB)

**PROJECT PARTNERS**

Royal National Institute  
of Blind People (RNIB)  
Scotland and Fighting  
Blindness Ireland

Start Date: 01/01/2017

End Date: 31/12/2022



<https://www.rnib.org.uk/your-area-northern-ireland/services-rnib-northern-ireland/need-to-talk>

SPECIAL EU PROGRAMMES BODY

## Project Case Study: Supporting People with Sight Loss and Blindness During COVID-19

One of the key talking points for those affected by sight loss or blindness is isolation. Lockdown has left millions of people feeling isolated, but for blind and partially sighted people this period has been considerably isolating. People with a visual impairment often build up highly effective support mechanisms which may rely on other people. COVID impacted these support systems overnight.



The Need to Talk project was quickly able to respond to this critical need. The project is providing a cross-border counselling service and confidence building programme for people affected by sight loss throughout Northern Ireland, the border counties of Ireland and Western Scotland (Ayrshire & Arran and Highlands & Islands).

*“Our counselling services carried on as normal, with staff relocating for home-working. However, we noticed that on top of the normal issues regarding living with a visual impairment, the community were presenting with COVID-19 based issues that needed immediate attention.*

*In response, we developed Emergency Mental Health Sessions, which gave someone an hour with a qualified counsellor to talk through, find support and strategies for what was impacting them at this very strange time. Some of the issues were Isolation ; Loneliness ; Fear; Concern over eye appointments; Not being able to connect with loved ones and How to get food.”*

**Amanda Hawkins, Specialist Lead for Counselling and Well-being, Need to Talk Project Lead**

Having moved online using video conference technology, the projects ‘Living with Sight Loss’ courses proved extremely popular, allowing people to connect and get support. Developed prior to COVID-19, the courses assist people in dealing with issues surrounding sight loss including: mobility and daily living; emotional support and well-being; assistive technology; eye health; peer support and an opportunity for people with sight loss to meet and connect with each other. Family and friends are also encouraged to attend the courses.