

Press Release

Date: 12th October 2017

FREE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING PROJECT LAUNCHES FOR PEOPLE AFFECTED BY SIGHT LOSS

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) in partnership with Fighting Blindness (Ireland) launches the EU INTERREG VA funded 'Need to Talk' project. The event takes place at 11.30am on Thursday 12 October (World Sight Day) in Stranmillis College, Belfast. 'Need to Talk' offers a free cross-border counselling service and confidence building program for people affected by sight loss who live in Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland.

Research recently undertaken by RNIB stated that 'respondents with sight loss are nearly three times as likely as people with no impairment to report feeling depressed, are more likely to report feeling constantly under strain, losing confidence and believing they are useless (Living with Sight Loss, RNIB and NatCen Social Research, 2015). During these times, many people find it helpful to talk through their feelings with someone outside their usual circle of family and friends.

The 'Need to Talk' project will support people of all ages, including children and young people aged eleven plus. Through free, confidential, online (email, instant messaging and video conferencing) and telephone counselling delivered by trained counsellors. People can access the support they need via their laptop, tablet or phone, in their own home, in their own way.

Amanda Hawkins, Lead for Counselling and Emotional Support, RNIB said: **“For anyone affected by sight loss, the impact can be devastating; they may be worried about the future and the changes they are facing. This project will support people with sight loss who are socially isolated, in emotional distress and includes those living in rural locations.”**

She continued: **“We are particularly delighted to be working in partnership with Fighting Blindness in the Republic of Ireland to deliver this project and we would like**

to acknowledge INTERREG VA EU funding and the Special EU Programmes Body for their continued support.”

‘Need to Talk’ is a five year project (2017-2021) and secured €1.8 million via the European Union’s INTERREG VA Programme which is managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

Welcoming the project Gina McIntyre, Chief Executive Officer with the Special EU Programmes Body, said: **“I am delighted that this innovative project has been awarded funding from the INTERREG VA programme. Having had the pleasure of meeting people who will benefit from this service, I know what a real and tangible contribution it will make to the lives of many people, who are experiencing varying degrees of sight loss.”**

“The cross-border project represents a unique partnership between leading sight loss charities based in Northern Ireland, Ireland and Western Scotland, who by working together, will be able to provide much needed support to people living in rural areas. This project will contribute to one of the objectives of the EU's INTERREG VA Programme- that of providing quality health and social care for people who are socially isolated,” she continued.

Many people face sight loss without help. Most people do not get any emotional support to help them adjust to losing sight and only a small proportion of people receive the practical support they need. (My Voice, RNIB Report, 2015).

Ken Carson, (52) from Bangor has optic neuritis, a condition which is causing progressive deterioration to his sight. When Ken needed to start using specialist equipment, he came to a difficult point.

“I’ve always known my eyesight would deteriorate gradually, but when reality kicked in that I was really losing my eyesight, I became quite low and depressed. I had to be on antidepressants. I wasn’t fit for work, and was off for eight months. I was in a dark place,” Ken recalls.



Ken reached out to RNIB and was invited to attend a confidence building program, designed to help people cope with the challenges of living with sight loss. Over the course, Ken and other participants learned about useful services, helpful products and tips for living confidently with sight loss. **“I went into the programme feeling down and full of anxiety. But within one day, I was relaxed,”** Ken says. Meeting a counsellor and a life coach was a key part of the programme for Ken.

“They helped me realise that I needed counselling and pointed me in the right direction to get over my depression. I’ve been able to look ahead positively and do what I can with the eyesight I have left. I’ve actually found I’ve had opportunities open up to do new things because of my sight loss.”

We can help and support other people like Ken to face the future with confidence. To find out more about the counselling and confidence building services in your area phone our ‘Need to Talk’ team on **0303 123 9999** or visit rnib.org.uk/needtotalk

- ENDS

Notes to Editor:

Living with Sight Loss: Updating the National Picture

Authors: Kate Flynn and Chris Lord; Publisher: RNIB and NatGen Social Research; Published: 2015

My Voice, RNIB Report 2015: The views and experiences of blind and partially sighted people in the UK. Authors: John Slade and Rose Edwards; Publisher: RNIB; Published: 2015

About RNIB

We’re RNIB and we’re here for everyone affected by sight loss. Whether you’re losing your sight or you’re blind or partially sighted, our practical and emotional support can help you face the future with confidence. Call us on 0303 123 9999 or visit www.rnib.org.uk



About Fighting Blindness, Republic of Ireland

Fighting Blindness is an Irish patient-led charity with a vision to cure, support and empower. Funding world-leading research into treatments and cures for blindness, while caring for people and families through counselling and peer to peer support services. Through education and advocacy working tirelessly to empower the 246,773 people in Ireland living with blindness or vision impairment.

Telephone: +3531 6789 004 or visit www.fightingblindness.ie

What will be offered to people with sight loss in the various locations?

- Telephone counselling - Available in Northern Ireland, border regions of Republic of Ireland and Western Scotland
- Online counselling - via email, video conferencing or instant messaging
- Face to face counselling (available in the border counties of the Republic of Ireland, delivered by Fighting Blindness)
- Face to face confidence building support across NI and border regions of ROI
- Online confidence building programme-launching in 2018

What areas are covered?

RNIB Scotland and Northern Ireland

Areas covered: Northern Ireland wide. Scotland: Dumfries and Galloway, North, South and East Ayrshire, Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh, Arran and Cumbrae, Argyll and Bute and Na h-Eileanan Siar (Western Isles).

Phone: 0303 123 9999

Email: needtotalk@rnib.org.uk

Fighting Blindness, Republic of Ireland

Areas covered: Counties of Donegal, Louth, Cavan, Sligo, Leitrim and Monaghan

Phone: +353 1 674 6496

Email: needtotalk@fightingblindness.ie

SEUPB



- The Special EU Programmes Body is a North/South Implementation Body sponsored by the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Ireland. It is responsible for managing two EU Structural Funds Programmes, PEACE IV and INTERREG VA which are designed to enhance cross-border co-operation, promote reconciliation and create a more peaceful and prosperous society.
- The Programmes operate within a clearly defined area including Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and in the case of INTERREG VA, Western Scotland.
- The INTERREG VA Programme has a value of €283 million and aims to address the economic and social problems which result from the existence of borders.
- For more information on the SEUPB please visit www.seupb.eu