

## Statement

Thank you, Chairperson and Committee members, for the invitation to speak to you today. I am a self-advocate with lived experience of vision impairment Eileen Battersby. I am 60+. I live very independently in Chapelizod Dublin with my Guide Dog Yevhen.

I am presently taking a course at a NLN QQI level 4 in Employment Based Training. My work experience is with Vision Ireland (NCBI) I assist tutors and support students in the National Training Centre on the Whithworth Road.

I have had low vision from birth (Congenital Cataracts) and found ways to negotiate my world in the early years with support from my Parents and family.

I attended St Mary's boarding school for Blind Girls back in the 1970s where I gained independent skills from Teachers, and my peers. Where I achieved Leaving Certificate.

After completing my Leaving cert I wanted to study nursing. Because of my low vision it became a hurdle too far. However through my determination I found a job in health care, a health care assistant-working with people with intellectual and physical disabilities for 35years.

Over the years my mental health suffered, a lot of this was due to being in denial about my vision impairment. I had never disclosed my vision issue in my workplace. I feared losing my job. My fears were realised after I applied to Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind for A Guide Dog. I was matched with my first Guide Dog Hattie in 2012.

After being on sick leave I had to medical review before I could return to work and the medical officer who did the review said I had no useful vision as a result my employment was terminated.

I was guided towards attending NCBI (Vision Ireland) and found many coping skills particularly in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) using assistive technology.

## Giving Back

In my work placement with people who are losing or have lost their eyesight, I enjoy helping people gain the skills to live independently.

We have designed a training kitchen equipped with adapted items, at **National Training Centre of Vision Ireland**. A very basic task to make a cup of tea for themselves, this can be daunting without sight but with a (one cup) kettle and a liquid level indicator. This is very simple and **satisfying** for the people I help.

Also the students practice with support, making their own breakfast, gaining confidence and independence using a toaster and a Microwave and now introducing the Air Fryer.

## Barriers

Some of the key Barriers for visually impaired adults is inclusion into the Employment market

Education and training needs in Assistive Technology. Would be beneficial, unfortunately there is only one National Training Centre for visually impaired adults in Ireland which is in Druncondra. However with the specialised training, people with sight loss can return to or gain useful employment.

The lack of public transport particularly in rural areas prevents visually impaired people from accessing their training needs, supports and independence

The cost of Assistive Technology can be a barrier for people with low vision.

A very important issues for visually impaired people is, the lack of education and awareness that fully sighted have. The general public may not be aware that there are many levels of low vision and not everyone with a white cane or a guide dog is totally blind

## Suggestions

There is a need for a campaign for awareness of the needs of people with low or no vision. With the introduction of Electric cars and Scooters not to mention the push bikes makes the roads less safe as there is no sounds to indicate their position. Simple things like private bins being left of the footpaths.

A need for groups for Visually Impaired people where they could share their lived experiences with their peers

I would like to see the introduction of Blind Sheds. Similar to the (Man Sheds.) where we could help each other negotiate life in a supportive way. Blind and visually impaired people have life experiences that can be shared with others.

I am very new to awareness around self-advocacy, and hope after a little training and practice I will encourage other people with vision impairments to advocate for their needs.

Please be aware that as a person with a visual impairment I would appreciate people announce themselves to me so that I can address them correctly.

Thanking you again for inviting me to speak today.