



**VISION
SPORTS
IRELAND**



2021 Annual Report



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About Us

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About Us

Vision Sports Ireland is the National Governing Body (NGB) for sport and recreation for people who are blind and vision impaired in Ireland. Vision Sports promotes a variety both mainstream and adapted sports.

Vision Sports Ireland was founded in 1988, and in March 2020 merged with NCBI – The National Council for the Blind Ireland, with the aim of increasing reach and opportunities.

Vision Sports advocates for equal access to sport and leisure opportunities and the health benefits derived from regular participation in sports and recreational activities, from recreational to elite level.



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Our Vision

All people who are blind or vision impaired people will have access to and enjoy the health benefits derived from regular participation in sport and recreational activities of their choice.

Our Mission

To enable blind and vision impaired people to step on to, and climb should they wish, the sports and leisure ladder.



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Our Values



Strategic Priorities



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CEO/ National Sports Development Manager Statement

2021 was a challenging year for Vision Sports Ireland and wider Irish society with Covid-19 still very much prevalent.

Celebrating the one-year anniversary of merging with NCBI, Vision Sports continued our strategic ambition to increase reach and participation in sport and leisure opportunities across Ireland. With continued lockdowns, Vision Sports were limited with community outreach opportunities however embraced the opportunity for innovation to engage with members in new ways, and allowed new programme growth and collaboration.

As Vision Sports Ireland is a small team, it is imperative that we work closely in collaboration and partnership with our NGB partners and support accessible sporting opportunities within local communities. In 2021, MOUs were put in place with an additional three NGB partners and monthly meetings held with all ten NGBs to progress collaboration projects.

A new online exercise series proved a huge success and has since become an integral part to engaging with new members. Over 176 audio described online classes were delivered by qualified instructors. Vision Sports believes technology has a key role to play in removing barriers such as transport and geography, and we will continue to be innovative in this space.

As summer progressed, Vision Sports responded to needs identified by our members, provided further support in the form of a Home Exercise Grant Scheme. This scheme was introduced to support exercising at home during the pandemic and beyond. There was a great response with 50 eligible members benefiting from the scheme.

As restrictions eased in the autumn, Vision Sports launched Ireland's first Vision Impaired Rugby programme and hosted our inaugural Zero Limits Track Day at Mondello Park.

Vision Sports endeavors to continue to listen and respond to the goals and aspirations of our members and work with key stakeholders to increase physical activity opportunities for all people who are blind or vision impaired nationally across Ireland.



Aaron Mullaniff

CEO



Pádraig Healy

National Sports Development Manager

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Governance

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Board of Directors

Board of Directors - 2021	Jan 28 th	Mar 10 th	April 21 st	June 2 th	July 21 st	Sept 22 nd	Nov 3 rd
Mr Paul Ledwidge (Chair)							
Ms Sandra Watts							
Mr Jason Smyth				X	X		
Ms Ann Cusack				X	X		
Mr Martin Kelly			X				
Mr Donnacha McCarthy	X		X	X		X	
Mr Robbie Cousins			X				
Mr Raymond McSweeney							
Ms Beradette Everard		X					
Mr Alan Worrell	X					Completed tenure	
Mr Rahim Nazarali	X					Completed tenure	

X = Apologies provided

Vision Sports Ireland would like to express our sincere gratitude to all individuals named above and to all past members of our Board of Directors for their hard work, time, dedication and guidance in ensuring Vision Sports can continue to work towards providing sport and physical activities to people with a vision impairment.

In 2021, Vision Sports achieved full compliance to the Sport Ireland Governance Code for Sport and Charities Governance Code on March 31st.

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Reach

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Social Media

Vision Sports Ireland sought to increase digital presence and social media footprint in 2021. Setting out objectives to improve the standard and profile, Vision Sports Ireland created further brand awareness through the promotion partnerships, education and training opportunities, programmes and events to the wider community.

Initial targets to increase social media followers by 5% in 2021, were surpassed on all platforms.

- Twitter: +10%
- Facebook: +18%
- Instagram Growth: +53%
- LinkedIn Growth: +28,400% (New account)
- Mailing List: +59%

Vision Sports continued to grow and build our media platforms and introduced a LinkedIn account, allowing engagement with a wider audience.

In August 2021, Vision Sports Ireland received a special mention regarding the launch of the partnership with the IRFU on the Sport for Business Social Media report for NGBs engagement and followers, placing 23rd overall (/49, +206%) a new milestone for the organisation and was our highest place to date.

As a National Governing Body, Vision Sports must continue to optimise our approach, adapt and change with the dynamic environment and will continue to so in 2022 and beyond.

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Members Monday

In November 2021, Vision Sports launched our 'Member Mondays' social media campaign. This campaign was developed to showcase our Vision Sports members from grassroots to elite level, each providing advice aiming to empower others to get involved in sport and leisure.

Promotional Content

A key strategic priority for Vision Sports in 2021 was also to increase awareness of our organisation and the work we do. Vision Sports developed a number of promotional resources to support this and plan to further invest in this space throughout 2022.

2021 projects include:

- Supporting NCBI to develop a new Sighted Guide Training video
- Zero Limits promotional video
- Tandem Pilot Training Course Video
- Club Spotlight – Galway Vision Impaired Activity Club

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Events

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Zero Limits Track Day

Kicking off European Week of Sport, Vision Sports' Zero Limits Track Day was held on Thursday September 23rd at Mondello Park in association with Motorsport Ireland, Sport Ireland and event corporate partner Windsor Motors.



It was a day to remember with 35 blind and vision impaired participants taking the wheel of red-hot dual control cars on the Mondello Park circuit. Participant Megan Rooney, 18, expressed her excitement,

“It was brilliant to have the opportunity to do this. I’ve always had such a big interest in cars and my biggest dream was to drive and thanks to Vision Sports Ireland today, my dreams came true”.

After an exhilarating morning, 50 participants kicked it up a gear becoming rally co-drivers alongside some of Ireland’s finest rally drivers in 10 top-spec rally cars, including a Mk II Escort, Fiesta R2 and R5 and an Evo X.

Vision Sports were also delighted to welcome record breaking Irish rallying legend, 84 year old Rosemary Smith, to the event. Rosemary commented

“I’ve been to Mondello many times over the years, but the enthusiasm and energy at Vision Sports’ Zero Limits Track Day was like nothing else I’ve experienced here before. The delight on the faces of the participants after the morning driving experience, followed by the excitement of getting into a rallycar was so special – it was an honour to get to get behind the wheel of the Renault Twingo and share this experience with them. I am an advocate for changing perceptions, chasing new experiences and doing what you love – and I’m thrilled that we got to share and make Motorsport accessible together today.”

Rosemary has kindly pledged her support for the event and vows to be in attendance in future,

“I was delighted to be invited – I think I had even more fun than the participants!”

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Padraig Healy, National Sports Development Manager of Vision Sport Ireland commented

“ ‘Your Ambition, Our Mission’ is the mantra of Vision Sports Ireland. Supporting our members to experience the benefits of Sport and physical activity is what we work to achieve. The inaugural Zero Limits Track Day at Mondello Park certainly provided an experience of a lifetime for all involved and we are overwhelmed with the positive feedback from participants and volunteers who attended this unique driving experience day. We were delighted to host the event on the opening day of the European Week of Sport and to collaborate with our event partners”.

A spokesperson for the corporate event partner Windsor Motors stated “Windsor are so proud to support the NCBI and Vision Sports Ireland in hosting their inaugural Zero Limits Track Day in Mondello Park during the European Week of Sport. At Windsor, our ‘Drive happy’ ethos encourages the enjoyment of driving, and throughout the day we were inspired to see many smiles and excitement as participants experienced life behind the wheel of a car for the very first time. We are delighted to play a small part in helping those who are blind or vision impaired to get involved in sport, at any level.”



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MayFest

In 2021, Vision Sports Ireland also celebrated our 40th Mayfest, a little differently to usual!

In contrast to previous events, faced with government Covid-19 restrictions and closures, Vision Sports made the decision to organise the event online for the first time in its history. The event boasted a week-long timetable of physical activity sessions, challenges, webinars, and virtual get togethers, concluding with a star studded closing ceremony, hosted by RTE's Miriam O'Callaghan. The ceremony included Q&As with special guests including Paralympic Gold medalist, Jason Smyth.

123 participants registered for activities throughout the week

Mayfest 2021 Timetable

Date	Activity	Time	
1 st May	Saturday	Family Dance - Come & Try	10am – 11am
1 st May	Saturday	Not parkrun Celebration	Any Time
1 st May	Saturday	Blind Tennis for ages 8-16 - Come & Try	12 - 1 PM
1 st May	Saturday	MayFest 40k Challenge Run, Walk, Cycle	9.30-10:30 AM
2 nd May	Sunday	Opening Ceremony – Celebrating 40 Years (Reeling in The Years)	8-9 PM
3 rd May	Monday	Yoga For All - Come & Try	10-10:45 AM
4 th May	Tuesday	Sight & Sound, Blind Tennis Webinar	5 - 5:45 PM
4 th May	Tuesday	Over 50s, Movement, Balance and Stretch Class	10 – 11 AM
5 th May	Wednesday	40 Minutes of Movement - Come & Try	10 – 10:40 AM
5 th May	Wednesday	Zoom Fitness - Come & Try	6:30-7:30 PM
6 th May	Thursday	Nature Mindfulness - Come & Try	10 - 11 AM
6 th May	Thursday	SafeFood Nutrition Webinar	3 – 4 PM
7 th May	Friday	Teen Fitness Come & Try for Ages 12-16	4:30 – 5 PM
7 th May	Friday	Closing Ceremony, Hosted by Special Guest Miriam O'Callaghan	5 – 6 PM



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Initiatives

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Online Fitness Series

Launched by Vision Sports in early 2021, the Home Exercise Series provided a series of audio described online home exercise classes that are ran by fully qualified and experienced instructors. Unlike mainstream classes for the general public, additional description is provided for the classes, including cues of body positioning and safe exercise practices.

Multiple live classes are delivered to participants each week via Zoom based on member feedback, which include, yoga and somatic movement, Over-50s movement, balance, High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT), Nature Mindfulness (to respond to reduction in wellbeing scores), family dance, Boxercise, Pound Fit and teen/kids' fitness.

These classes were free of charge for all NCBI and Vision Sports members, eliminating the economical barrier to accessing physical activity.

“The classes are well structured and explained, so it's easy to follow while still being a good workout - I feel great after each class and feel like I have been pushed without overdoing it, it's fabulous! Thank you for the opportunity to do this as I find other online classes can be quite difficult to follow because they're not clear and the pace can be too fast.”



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Home Exercise Series – Participant Spotlight

Joan, Co. Galway

Favourite Class - Over 50's Movement Balance & Stretch

Tell us about how you first got involved:

In early 2021 I attended a Zoom 'Living with sight loss' course run by Fighting Blindness where Pdraig and Sara of Vision Sports Ireland were guest speakers at one of the sessions. I was delighted to hear about the physical activities that Vision Sports provided so I registered straight away for the Zoom Over 50s Movement Balance and Stretch and yoga sessions. I have found that participating in weekly sessions has strengthened and tightened my muscles which are prone to weakness and fatigue. It has also had great mental health benefits for me, particularly during the pandemic when the country was locked down. The exercise helped me to focus my mind on something positive.



Why do you think it's important that women participate in sport and exercise?

Regular exercise is considered important for bone strength and health, especially for older women. I have found that doing a regular exercise routine has helped me in my dealings with osteoporosis, made me more agile and improved my bone density.

What is your top tip to get involved in sport?

Get involved with Vision Sports Ireland because they have a variety of activities available outdoors or indoors. I have muscle fatigue and visual & hearing impairment so outdoor exercise wasn't an option for me and I'm delighted that I get the support to keep active

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Home Equipment Scheme

With the closure of gyms and public spaces due to COVID-19, Vision Sports Ireland developed the Home Equipment Grant available to members to aid the purchase of home exercise equipment.

Applicants could apply for funding of up to €250 to aid in the purchase of home exercise equipment that allowed people to stay physically active in their homes during restrictions.

In total of over €8,000 was distributed to 50 members for equipment, including rowing machines, treadmills, exercise bikes and free weights.

“It helped me loose 20kg in 6 months”

“I am able to exercise independently. I don’t need anyone to take me out new lease of life”



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Youth Leadership Programme

In August 2021, Vision Sports launched its inaugural Youth Leadership Programme. The programme aims to guide participants through a leadership learning process, and empower young people to gain increased self-awareness, encourage increased independence and confidence, and challenge their personal narratives around disability.

As the first cohort of Youth Leaders, 8 teenagers with a vision impairment joined the team for 6 weeks for a combination of in-person and online modules.

Week 1 – Team building, CP Adventure

Week 2 – Sports Administration (Jason Smyth, Paralympian - Q&A)

Week 3 – Leadership (Katie-George Dunleavy, Paralympian - Q&A)

Week 4 – First Aid (certified basic first aid certificate awarded)

Week 5 - Resilience and Advocacy (Jack Kavanagh)

Week 6 – Presentations (Orla Comerford, Paralympian - Q&A)

All participants will be awarded with their Youth Leadership medals at MayFest 2022.

“The Youth Leadership Programme was a great experience. I learned all of the qualities and skills needed to be a good leader, heard from Paralympians about their experiences and what they believed made a great leader. As part of the programme I also learned first aid which is a valuable life skill and now I am volunteering with the St. John Ambulance.”

Ciaran, Youth Leader



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Women in Sport

Vision Sports Ireland continued to champion our Women in Sport programmes in 2021, beginning with the social media campaign, 'Choose to Challenge', marking International Women's Day on March 8th. 'Choose to Challenge' aims to promote equal access to sport, and encouraging organisations, clubs, teams, businesses, media and athletes to actively make choices to seek out and celebrate female talent and achievement in sport.

Throughout 2021, Vision Sports also offered female-only Women in Sport taster sessions in Rowing ('Give it a Row', in partnership with Dublin City Sports and Wellbeing Partnership) and Kayaking, with over 20 participants joining us on the water over two days.

In 2021, Vision Sports was also in receipt of two years of funding for research into barriers to participation for girls with a vision impairment, under the Women in Sport funding stream.



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Development

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Development – Throughout 2021, MOUs were signed with Tennis Ireland, IRFU and FAI. Significant progress was made with developing relationships with other NGBs including Golf Ireland, Cycling Ireland, Motorsport Ireland, Athletics Ireland and get Ireland Walking.

Programme Support – Programme support was provided to Vision Impaired Specific clubs, NGBs and LSPs. In total 8 clubs and organisations benefited from funding support from Vision Sports Ireland in 2021.

Vision Impaired Golf

In September, Vision Sports in partnership with Golf Ireland and Laois Sports Partnership hosted a Blind/VI Golf Come and Try Session at Portlaoise Golf Club. The session was a great success with 12 participants in attendance.

Additionally, a training programme was designed for volunteers that led to the training of five new Blind/VI golf volunteers being trained.



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Blind Football

Vision Impaired/Blind Football returned in Summer 2021 with the establishment of two new junior football in partnership with the FAI Football for All Programme. Mervue United FC in Galway became the first club in the west of Ireland to launch a Vision Impaired/Blind programme in June 2021, whilst Bohemians FC, Dublin launched their hub in July 2021.

Vision Sports Ireland and FAI aim to support and grow three VI/Blind football hubs and plan to add new additions in early 2022, implementing structures supporting the growth of grassroots and identifying a pathway for players to feed into the international team.



Vision Impaired Swimming

In 2021, Vision Sports in partnership with Swim Ireland, delivered weekly recreational swimming lessons for both adults and children at Markievicz Leisue Centre, Dublin. Sessions were delivered by qualified and experienced Swim Teachers. Vision Sports Ireland are working with Swim Ireland to develop further Vision Impaired/Blind swimming programmes across Ireland.

Vision Sports Ireland and Swim Ireland are working hard to develop training and education opportunities and established a Vision Impaired Swimming CPD in 2021 which is currently available to Swim Ireland Swim Teachers.

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Vision Impaired Rugby

In September 2021, Vision Sports in collaboration with the IRFU, The Change Foundation and Old Wesley RFC established Ireland's first Vision Impaired Rugby programme.

The initiative began with a coach training workshop with nine volunteers trained to lead the programme. This workshop was followed by the first Vision Impaired Rugby session at Old Wesley RFC on September 11th as a part of Sport Ireland's European Week of Sport. International Rugby player Ian McKinley, joined the team to share his love of rugby and provide training tips. In total 29 players attended the 3 sessions that took place in 2021.

“Even in the last few weeks since Sean has started coming to the VI rugby, the difference in Sean himself confidence wise in everyday things is amazing” - Aine



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Collaboration

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Throughout 2021, Vision Sports worked towards building relationships and increasing collaboration with key partners including NCBI Departments, NGBs, LSPs and Disability Services.

Within 12 months, Vision Sports Ireland referrals from NCBI staff increased by 90%, amounting to 51% of total referrals for that period.



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Summer Camps

Vision Sports additionally supported a number of Local Sports Partnerships and disability services to host summer camps for children and adolescence who are blind and vision impaired including:

- ChildVision
- DLR Sport Partnership
- Laois Sports Partnership
- NCBI Tallaght

A total of 54 children were supported through summer camps.



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Support Spotlight - Camp Abilities

Vision Sports were delighted to collaborate with and support the NCBI Children's and Young Persons Team in hosting Virtual Camp Abilities 2021 where 40 participants engaged in a wide range of activities including tennis, football and fitness classes over 4 days.

"It was an amazing experience from start to finish, lovely to be able to connect with the other campers and hear stories from the volunteers"



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Education

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Vision Sports Awareness Training

In 2021, Vision Sports worked to develop a Training and Education Framework, in partnership with Sport Ireland Coaching.

Sport Ireland Chief Executive, John Treacy officially launched the Vision Sports Awareness Training at the National Indoor Arena on Thursday, 11th November 2021 with Paralympic Cyclists Martin Gordon and his pilot Eamonn Byrne.

The Vision Sports Awareness Training is designed to support coaches, volunteers and teachers with knowledge and skills to adapt sports for best practice accessibility for participants who are blind and vision impaired. Supported by Sport Ireland Coaching, the course will become the Foundation Level of all future training opportunities by Vision Sports Ireland.

Speaking at the launch, John Treacy, Chief Executive of Sport Ireland commented,

“Sport Ireland welcomes the launch of the Vision Sports Awareness Training. I would encourage as many coaches, volunteers, teachers, Local Sports Partnerships and National Governing Bodies of Sport to undertake the training and to help make sport accessible for all. Making sport accessible to everyone is a key priority of the Government's National Sport Policy. This Sport Ireland Coaching accredited training will increase awareness of visual impairment and support the adaptation of all sports to be more inclusive. Vision Sports Ireland are to be commended for the development of this innovative training course and I wish them every success with its rollout over the coming weeks.”

In 2021, 102 people have completed the course.

“A Great Awareness Workshop! Hit the nail on the head with essential, key areas and information required if you were someone who is or will be working with someone with a visual impairment”



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Tandem Pilot Training Course

Vision Sports in collaboration with Cycling Ireland additionally designed and developed a tandem pilot training course, with the aim to establish a network of volunteer pilots across Ireland.

In 2021, as a pilot programme prior to launch in 2022, 18 tandem pilots completed the course across Galway and Dublin.

A training video resource and manual have also been created to support the roll out of the training.



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Sustainability

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Organisation Growth

Vision Sports Ireland recruited Sarah Maloney as Operations and Communications Co-Ordinator in June 2021 which has had a direct impact growth and impacts.

Sarah Maloney

Sarah started her journey with Vision Sports Ireland in June 2021 as Operations and Communications Coordinator. Her duties include overseeing all marketing and communications, including promotion of services, and aiding the collaboration with NGBs and LSPs to increase physical activity opportunities on a national scale.

In 2020, Sarah graduated from UCD with a MSc in Sport Management having previously completed her BSc in Sports and Exercise Science from the University of Sunderland. She is passionate about the growth and development of Irish sport and physical activity, with particular interest in grassroots participation.

Prior to her appointment, Sarah worked with the Federation of Irish Sport and was also involved with the development and implementation of 'Gaelic for Mother's & other's' and the 'Gaelic for Girls' program in her local area. Additionally, she worked alongside league of Ireland teams including Bohemians FC and Shelbourne FC assisting the medical team with injury prevention and rehabilitation.

Sarah has been actively involved in sport from a young age, having previously played with the Pittsburgh Banshees in Pennsylvania and currently plays Gaelic Football with her local club Lucan Sarsfield's.



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Research

In 2021, Vision Sports continued to engage in research opportunities working with our members to assess current physical activity levels as a result of Covid-19 restrictions, to ensure our work continued to support people to increase physical activity opportunities. Results suggested that:

- Whilst there was a slight improvement, 84% of respondents reported that Covid-19 restrictions were still majorly impacting their engagement in physical activity (from 90% in April/May 2020);
- 61% of respondents were exercising less than January 2020;
- 72% of respondents were unable to meet the National Physical Guidelines of at least 30 minutes a day of moderate intensity activity, five days a week (or 150 minutes a week)
- More than 1 in 2 (55%) of respondents reported that Covid-19 restrictions on exercise had a considerable negative impact on their mental health (up from 50% in 2020)
- 81% of this cohort are participating in less exercise per week than January 2020, leading to the development

As a result of the research findings, Vision Sports launched the Pass-Sport Programme working with government Departments to mobilise registered guides to support access to sport and physical activity, and launched the Online Exercise Series.

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Physical Activity Levels Research Study

In December 2021, Vision Sports Ireland, National Council for the Blind of Ireland were delighted to announce a collaboration with DCU's School of Health and Human Performance and the Insight SFI Research Centre for Data Analytics.

This ambitious project aims to carry out a first of its kind investigation of the physical activity, sports participation, and wellbeing of blind and vision impaired children and adolescents. In essence, a 'snapshot' of the state of play in Ireland with recommendations for future development and policy in this area.

By identifying sport and leisure options, issues, and barriers across the lifecycle, the team involved believe that the level of sports participation can be greatly increased among this cohort of young people and also by those who may be vulnerable to economic, social and educational disadvantage. The project also aligns with Sport Ireland's recently released research strategy.

Prof. Noel O'Connor, CEO, Insight SFI Research Centre of Data Analytics, said: "We all aspire to a truly inclusive society yet the findings of the 2016 census on participation levels of the visually impaired in sport and leisure activities highlight a key national challenge in this regard. It is our duty as a society to better understand why this is happening, and on this basis find ways of addressing the situation.

This project will address the first of these challenges - measuring and understanding the extent of the challenge. Under the expert guidance of our partners, Insight researchers will apply state of the art data collection and analysis techniques. The learnings we elicit from this first of a kind study will allow all partners to work together to affect positive change."

Aaron Mullaniff Vision Sports Ireland CEO noted that the research project is "a critical stepping stone to putting in place needs led structures and programmes which will increase physical activity 'life chances' for blind and vision impaired people across the entire lifecycle"

