LEITRIM COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND...GIVING A GOOD SERVICE

Sean McGauran

"The Annual Church Gate Collection in aid of Co Leitrim Branch of the NCBI will be taken up on Sunday next " a note in the Manorhamilton or Ballinamore local notes over the past number of years that may have caught your eye.

"Who are they" some may ask, so for those who are fortunate enough not to know, this is the story.

Miss Alice S Armitage, realizing the need for better care, assistance, training and other needs of visually impaired people founded the National Council for the Blind of Ireland in 1930 and was its first President. She held this office until 1949 when she was succeeded by Miss Doris M R Armitage. Head Office was established at 10 Lower Hatch Street, Dublin and was known as Armitage House. From here local committees were set up, starting with Dublin and progressing out to all the counties of Ireland.

For Leitrim it might be best to quote from minutes of first meetings. "At a meeting in the County Hotel Carrick-on-Shannon on Friday 7th Dec. 1962 a branch of The National of the Blind was formed. The Chair was ably taken by Mr. Sean Keane, Superintendent Assistance Officer, Leitrim Co Council. Miss Barbra Knox, organizing secretary for the NCBI spoke of the work done by the council since its foundation by Miss Armitage in 1930. She explained the objects, Home Teaching Service, Prevention of Blindness, Wireless for the Blind, and the placing of the Blind in open employment.

Miss Josephine Kearney, assistant county organizer, told of the work done by the Home Teacher, visiting the Blind in their own homes and teaching them pass-time occupations and other skills.

A resolution "that a County Leitrim Branch of the National Council for the Blind of Ireland be formed" was proposed by Mrs Tom Bourke and seconded by Mrs Kathleen Lynch of Rosary High School.

Their first AGM was held on the 12th May 1964 in Drumshanbo. And we quote from the Secretary's Report: "Since the local committees were formed in Ck-on-Shannon, Mohill, Drumshanbo, Ballinamore and Manorhamilton, all of those have had fund raising events. Quarterly meetings were held, and at the February meeting in Mohill which was held on the 14th it was decided to set about appointing a home Teacher and the following Selection Committee was agreed. Rev Cannon Kearney, Mr Clements, Mr Holland, and Miss Woods County Organizer.

The post was advertised in the three Dailies and Local Press. Three candidates were interviewed on the 7th of April and Mrs Carrie Moroney of Ballinamore, a trained and experienced Home Teacher, was appointed and she commenced work on the 4th May".

Leitrim now had a Home Teacher of its own and Mrs Moroney very soon established herself as a capable and kind friend of all visually impaired

Carrie Moroney, appointed the first experienced Home Teacher in 1964.

people in the county. In 1984, she had about 200 persons on her register. This meant making over 900 visits, 750 phone calls and writing 350 letters for her clients. Lessons in Braille, typing and crafts as well as maintaining a Wireless and Talking Book service were all part of her days work.

Travelling was always a problem, but in spite of the shape of the county and the bad roads she could have 15,000 miles covered in a year. She retired in 1988 and was succeeded by Maighread Costello who retired in 1990. The Home Teachers title then changed to Social Worker with special people qualified for particular requirements for example Mobility or Computer training. Administration was taken over by head office and the northern part of the county was shared with Sligo while the south was shared with Cavan. This made life easier for the local branch, which was now able to concentrate on fundraising which is mainly Church Gate Collections and the Annual Christmas Day Swim in Garadice Lake.

Meanwhile in 1988 Head Office moved from Hatch Street to Whitworth

Road, Drumcondra, to what was the Drumcondra Hospital, re named P V Doyle House in memory of Vincent Doyle, a very generous benefactor of visually impaired people.

Part of the Council's Policy reads: "The National Council for the Blind is established to promote the full independence of people with impaired vision and to minimize the disabling effects of vision impairment ".

Approximately 18% of people using NCBI services are completely blind; the remaining 82% have varying degrees of usable, residual vision.

The Presidents of Ireland have all in their generosity acted as patrons of the NCBI and the Bishops of the two Dioceses with the Church of Ireland of the combined Dioceses are our County Branch Patrons. (The county includes Kilmore with Ardagh & Clonmacnoise)

The executive over the years included: *Chairpersons*–Rev Canon Kearney, Dr Kevin Quinn, Canon William Slator, Annie Cox and Paddy O'Connor. *Secretaries*–Eileen Bourke, Nora Murphy, Sean McGauran and Mary O'Boyle. *Treasurers*–Leonard Steepe, Anthony Gallagher, Aiden Heavey, Dennis O'Connor and Sean McGauran.

Edel O'Connell at her new office in Laird House, Drumshanbo, now provides services for County Leitrim. Here there is a wide range of tactile and audible aids on display. Services provided locally include assessments, advice on coping with daily living tasks, information on entitlements, support and counseling, Leitrim talking newspaper, and talking books and magazines. Other services include peer counseling, mobility training and specialist equipment provision. There is a Low Vision Clinic in Sligo every two months. This clinic may be visited by any person in Leitrim who finds it difficult to cope with impaired sight.

Referrals to NCBI can be through any health professional, self-referral or through family members. NCBI Leitrim can be contacted at 071-9640847.

We are very grateful for the loyal support of all friends who swim and/or collect at Church gates and to the generous subscribers to these fund-raising occasions.

ALL IRELAND CHALLENGE EVENT

Manorhamilton was the Leitrim venue for the recent all Ireland Challenge 32 fundraising event. Organised by the Rotary Clubs across Ireland, Caroline Casey founder of the Aishling Foundation and Tony Ward of Irish Blind Sports ran a mile in each of the 32 counties within 32 hours. Caroline and Tony, who are both registered blind, were raising funds for The Jack and Jill Foundation, Irish Blind Sports and PHAB. Local runners in each of the counties they visited raised additional sponsorship when they ran with the two blind athletes. Pictured above are the Manorhamilton runners with Councillor Enda McGloin, Leas Cathoirleach Leitrim County Council welcoming Caroline and Tony to Manorhamilton when their Irish Defence Forces Air Corps helicopter, which ferried the couple around the Republic of Ireland, landed in the Bee Park.

PHOTO: JAMES MOLLOY