



FIGHTING BLINDNESS
ANNUAL REPORT
& ACCOUNTS 2006 / 2007



**Fighting
Blindness**

Reg. Charity No: CHY6784



Table of Contents

01	Chairperson's Report
02	Chief Executive's Report
04	Research Report
06	Insight Counselling Centre Report
07	Public Affairs Report
08	Fundraising Report
09	Members of Staff
10	Independent Auditor's Report
12	Income & Expenditure Account
13	Balance Sheet

Board of Directors

Dave Waldron – Chairperson
Colette McNamee – Secretary
Tony Ward – Treasurer
Trish Burke
Stephen Farrelly
Jaqueline Hall
Frank Kelly



Strengthening Our Vision Chairperson's Report



After many years of rapid growth, Fighting Blindness has taken a breath and focused on strengthening the four pillars it is built upon; Research, Counselling, Communications and Fundraising.

During the past year of consolidation, there have been a number of changes. This includes changes among our staff and directors, an assessment of our research portfolio and the development of a new strategic plan for the years ahead.

At the end of 2006, Fighting Blindness won a very significant amount of co-funding from the Health Research Board (HRB) for four projects - thus demonstrating the quality of our research teams. However, we (the members, directors and staff of Fighting Blindness) demand more from the research to bring us closer to treatments and therapies. To achieve this, we have employed the skills of Prof. Michael Comer, as Head of Research. Prof Comer brings years of experience and a proven ability to transform laboratory-based research into clinical therapy and he is committed to helping us to realise our vision.

An assessment of our Insight Counselling service has shown it to be a vital service and greatly supportive to our members. Under the continued guidance of Mary Lavelle, we are now looking at ways of extending the service across the country to bring this support closer to home for many of our members.

All these developments require funding. Even though breaking through the million euro mark was a landmark occasion for our organisation - one aspired to for so long - we now need to double this income and plan for even better results and support in the future. Patrick Quinn has been appointed to the newly created role of Head of Fundraising and Development. It will be Patrick's task to open new and exciting avenues for Fighting Blindness.

As we continue to expand and strengthen the Board of Directors, we have been joined by Ms Jacqui Hall who brings a wealth of experience in the communications sector in Ireland.

There is an energy building in our organisation, with an air of excitement behind it; our network of supporters now number in the tens of thousands. This strength of belief and positive thought, combined with the promising strategy and skills within Fighting Blindness, give cause for more rising excitement as we look forward to the future.

To all of you who have supported us, and those who plan to, a great big thank you!

Dave Waldron
Chairperson





Chief Executive's Report

Exciting Developments to Take Place in Current Year

The year to March 2007 has been a challenging one for Fighting Blindness but I am glad to say that the income net of cost of income (the contribution) has been maintained and even slightly increased to a figure of €1,022,000 (€1,017,000 last year). Research expenditure at €166,000 is down on the expenditure of €281,000 last year but this is mostly a timing matter and we expect the research expenditure to be considerably increased in the current financial year.

This year's income is expected to significantly increase and we are confident of achieving our very demanding target of €1.9m in the period to March '08, with research expenditure reaching the €700,000 mark.

Fighting Blindness now has strengthened its team and I am more optimistic than ever about the future.

Head of Research

In February we recruited our first ever Head of Research, Professor Michael Comer, after a search lasting over a year for a suitable candidate. We were seeking somebody who not only had considerable scientific expertise but who also had a track record in the translational and administration end of science. Professor Comer is probably uniquely qualified in this country in that regard and we are

extremely lucky to have retained his services. Already he has made a huge impact on our Research Strategy and we anticipate being in a position to make some interesting announcements in the very near future.

Head of Fundraising

We have also been very lucky in securing the services of Mr Patrick Quinn as Head of Fundraising. Patrick has come from the Barretstown children's charity and has many years experience both in Industry and in Fundraising. His skill and expertise have already made a big difference to the organisation and we feel that our very ambitious fundraising targets over the next five years will be achieved under Patrick's guidance.

Strategic Development

As I write, we are currently at an advanced stage in our work on the Five Year Development Plan. The plan has both capital and current aspects and outlines the extremely exciting vision which we hope will have a major impact on the speed of therapy development in the field of retinal degenerations over the coming few years.

Genable Technologies Limited

In addition, we are still talking to Genable Technologies Ltd with a view to exploring how we can help them to expedite the development of their suppression/replacement gene therapy for dominantly



inherited retinopathies. You will recall that Genable is the Campus Company that grew out of our research in Trinity and in which we invested several years ago. We are at an advanced stage of discussions with a view to making a substantial investment in the company to facilitate and speed up their work.

Future

February 2008 will mark the 25th Anniversary of Fighting Blindness. Progress to date has been extraordinary, and in the years to come we will continue to take major strides to speed up the search for treatments and cures for retinal degenerative diseases that still affect so many in this country. We are confident that this important work will develop more speedily under the guidance of our new Head of Research.

Thank You

I would like to finish with a big thank you to all our members and supporters for their patience over the recent years. We believe your continued support will be rewarded by some very dramatic and exciting developments in the near future.

Michael Griffith
Chief Executive





Horizons in Sight Research Report

Fighting Blindness has been actively engaged for many years in promoting and funding research to discover treatments to prevent eye disorders that lead to sight impairment or total loss of sight. Progress has been encouraging but the success in terms of treatments has been limited. This apparent lack of progress is usual in medicine where many complex factors necessitate long periods of gathering knowledge and understanding the causes. It is rather like putting the pieces a large jig-saw puzzle together without having the final picture to guide you. However, having said that, the progress in finding many of the pieces and seeing a faint image are in sight. A “map” is gradually emerging that possibly leads to Fighting Blindness’s objective of preventing sight loss and/or restoring vision at least in part. It is therefore, exciting to note that a gene therapy treatment (for the condition known as RP 65) has begun and a chip implant has enabled a totally blind person to distinguish objects. Although these developments have not taken place in Ireland but in the United Kingdom and Germany respectively, we are very excited by the prospects of meaningful progress. Also, since our researchers are engaged in similar work we will be ready to implement any breakthroughs as they occur.





Research Portfolio

1. Genes and Gene Therapies

Over the years FB has been funding research in genetics where mutations or deletions in genes have led to the degeneration of sight. Many of these are rare diseases and all of them are complex. We are continuing to support world renowned research by scientists at Trinity College Dublin who are working on a complex system of “gene knock down and replacement” that could lead to a clinical treatment. An additional exciting part of this work is that it could have application in other hereditary diseases and genetic disorders.

2. Pharmico-physiology

In University College Cork we continue to fund research into “programmed cell death” so called “apoptosis” where we are told that a couple of interesting pharmacological entities have shown good results in hindering this process. This of course could find application in trying to slow down the loss of photo-receptor cells as with Retinitis Pigmentosa. We are also funding a group at Waterford Institute of Technology who are relating the importance of diet and substances derived from diet that can prevent blindness. This is also ground breaking science and clinical translational research.

3. Cells and Cell Therapy

You will have heard of stem cells and the potential to use these or progenitor cells

as potential implants to treat the onset of blindness associated with damage or degeneration of the retina or macula. Collaborative work in Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin and Queen’s University Belfast is creating a critical mass of researchers of significant proportions. It is worthwhile emphasising at this point that there are no ethical concerns about this research since it has nothing at all to do with either embryonic or foetal sources.

4. Bionics and Bio-physics

Also at UCC, in the Tyndall Institute, we are funding a research group working on implants that may provide optical signals via the optic nerve to the brain. As mentioned this work is being pioneered by a German group. We hope to cement stronger collaborations for future work.

Future Plans

In the next year we will continue to support our current researchers in the various universities and institutes while formulating a more consolidated approach in our efforts to speed up the pace of our research in order that real products can materialise to form the basis for novel treatments. We are encouraged by our approach and we will shortly announce a revolutionary proposal for going forward in terms of a Patient-led charity.

Prof. Mike Comer

Head of Research





Insight Counselling Centre Report



This is the fifth year of operations at the Insight Counselling Centre and to date over two hundred and sixty clients have availed of the services provided by the Centre.

Individual, couple and family sessions continue to be the main focus of the Centre. In addition, we offer a telephone support service to those unable to travel or those seeking a more immediate response. We are also continuing to hold monthly support group meetings in Dublin and Cork.

With the help of Dublin Bus Community Support Programme, a very successful activities weekend was enjoyed by members of the Dublin and Cork groups. Activities included canoeing, horse riding and walking. We are very grateful to Dublin Bus for their financial support of this event which we hope to repeat on an annual basis.

Our unique support service continues at both the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital and the Mater Hospital in Dublin each Wednesday and Thursday morning, respectively.

Our plans to expand the service on a nationwide basis are progressing and we are very excited at the prospect of providing a country-wide service to all vision-impaired people and their families in the very near future.

We would like to thank the Health Services Executive for their continued financial support, without which this service could not be provided. We would also like to thank our corporate sponsors for their continuing support for the Centre and all those who take part and support Fighting Blindness events. Your contribution is invaluable to the development of this vital service.

If you would like any further information or if we can help in any way, please do not hesitate to contact us at (01) 674 6496 or email insight@fightingblindness.ie

Mary Lavelle
Counselling Psychologist



Public Affairs Report

There have been significant developments in the Fighting Blindness Communications Strategy this year. Through the support of a private benefactor, we have been able to run an advertising campaign on RTE One Television which was a huge opportunity for the organisation to promote its brand. Our office was inundated with calls from individuals around the country who wanted to learn more about the eye conditions affecting themselves and members of their families and where they could find the necessary support and services.

The overwhelming response to our television campaign has highlighted a very real and urgent need for more public information on sight loss, its impact on society and how those affected can be more effectively supported. To address this need Fighting Blindness has continued to promote awareness throughout the media by contributing to current affairs and news programmes on television and radio as well as having news features carried in local and national newspapers and magazines.

We have continued to develop our website as an effective and accessible information tool and publish our quarterly 'Visionaries Newsletter' for our members and supporters. Fighting Blindness educates the public through national meetings and we continue to work closely with health

professionals at the front line of eye care and international organisations to ensure we have the most up to date information for all who require it.

Scientific networking groups initiated by Fighting Blindness, such as The All Ireland Retinal Research Network (AIRRN) and The Irish Network of Neural Stem-cell Investigators (INNSI), have opened up the communication channels for scientists and clinicians. In turn these groups are helping accelerate the search for treatments and cures for serious degenerative eye diseases.

In the coming year we are planning to expand our communications strategy and are in the process of increasing our communications team.

I would like to thank you, our members and supporters old and new, for your invaluable support and assistance throughout the year. I very much look forward to working with you in 2007/2008.

Avril Daly
Head of Public Affairs

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Fundraising Report



The net contribution of €1,022,876 to March 2007 was flat with the previous year but consolidated our fundraising base and provides us with a solid platform for future development. The majority of the income was again generated by a number of large scale events.

The fifth annual Gold Cup Ball took place at the Four Seasons Hotel and was a huge success for our charity raising €200,000. We could not have achieved this figure without the help and support of our dedicated committee and members of the Horse Racing Industry. We would also like to thank all those who attended for their generosity and commitment to our cause.

Our overseas treks continued to grow and this year we completed successful trips to India, Cambodia and Croatia. As a result of the tremendous fundraising efforts from our loyal band of trekkers and their supporters these treks raised over €210,000. We look forward to their continued support as we develop more international treks in new and exciting destinations.

Our Venetian Carnevale event continued to grow and develop attracting over 500 guests to Clontarf Castle in March. Numerous fundraising activities and events took place throughout the country from church gate collections and local music festivals to parachute jumping

and skydiving. Huge thanks is due to all those who raised funds and worked hard to make these events so successful.

Our direct mail and raffles campaigns did not produce the desired results early in the year and were restructured moving in to 2007. The early indications have been extremely positive and I am confident that these campaigns will now go from strength to strength.

A new five year fundraising strategy has been put in place starting in 2007/08. The overall aim is to develop our core supporter base by investing in direct marketing initiatives and expand our fundraising activities to focus on corporate and major donors. I am confident as we roll out the first year of the plan that we can increase our net contribution by over 50% and continue to grow this significantly over the period.

The fundraising team would like to thank everyone who helped us grow our fundraising events this year, by taking part in an event, volunteering and regularly contributing. We appreciate all these efforts and your continued commitment to Fighting Blindness.

Patrick Quinn
Head of Fundraising



Members of Staff



- 1 **Michael Griffith**
Chief Executive Officer
- 2 **Anna Wilson**
PA to Chief Executive
- 3 **Deborah McCann**
Financial Controller
- 4 **Prof. Mike Comer**
Head of Research

- 5 **Mary Lavelle**
Counselling Psychologist
- 6 **Avril Daly**
Head of Public Affairs
- 7 **Patrick Quinn**
Head of Fundraising & Development
- 8 **Clodagh Ryan**
Events Manager

- 9 **Sue Ryan**
Events Co-Ordinator
- 10 **Elaine Leinaweaver**
Campaigns & Database Manager
- 11 **Barbara Cahill**
Volunteer Coordinator





Independent Auditor's Report

We have audited the financial statements of Fighting Blindness which comprise the Income and Expenditure Account, the Balance Sheet and the related notes. These financial statements have been prepared under the historical cost convention as modified by the revaluation of certain fixed assets and the accounting policies.

This report is made solely to the company's members, as a body, in accordance with section 193 of the Companies Act, 1990. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the company and the company's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Respective responsibilities of directors and auditors

The directors' responsibilities for preparing the Annual Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and Irish Accounting Standards are set out in the Statement of Directors' Responsibilities. Our responsibility is to audit the financial statements in accordance with the relevant legal and regulatory requirements and Auditing Standards promulgated by the Auditing Practices Board in Ireland and the United Kingdom.

We report to you our opinion as to whether the financial statements give a true and fair view and are properly prepared in accordance with the Companies Acts. We also report to you whether, in our opinion: proper books of account have been kept by the company; whether at the balance sheet date there exists a financial situation requiring the convening of an extraordinary general meeting of the company; and whether the information contained in the Directors' Report is consistent with the financial statements. In addition, we state whether we have obtained all the information and explanations necessary for the purpose of our audit and whether the company's balance sheet and income and expenditure account are in agreement with the books of account and returns.

We report to the members if, in our opinion, any information specified by law regarding directors's remuneration and directors's transactions is not given and where practicable, include such information in our report.

We read the directors' report and consider the implications for our report if we become aware of any apparent misstatements within it.

Basis of opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with Auditing Standards issued by the Auditing Practices Board. An audit includes examination, on a test basis, of evidence



relevant to the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements. It also includes an assessment of the significant estimates and judgements made by the directors in the preparation of the financial statements, and whether the accounting policies are appropriate to the company's circumstances, consistently applied and adequately disclosed.

We planned and performed our audit so as to obtain all the information and explanations which we considered necessary in order to provide us with sufficient evidence to give reasonable assurance that the financial statements are free from material misstatement, whether caused by fraud or other irregularity or error.

In forming our opinion we also evaluated the overall adequacy of the presentation of information in the financial statements.

Opinion

In our opinion the financial statements give a true and fair view of the state of the company's affairs as at the 31 March 2007 and of its surplus for the year then ended and have been properly prepared in accordance with the Companies Acts 1963 to 2005.

We have obtained all the information and explanations we consider necessary for the purposes of our audit. In our opinion proper books of account have been kept

by the company. The financial statements are in agreement with the books of account.

In our opinion the information given in the directors' report is consistent with the financial statements.

Gorman Quigley Penrose
Chartered Accountants and
Registered Auditors
31-32 Greenmount Office Park
Harolds Cross Bridge
Dublin 6W





Income & Expenditure Account For Year Ended 31 March 2007

	2007	2006
	€	€
Income		
Fundraising	848,879	863,588
Membership	5,802	3,016
Other Income	55,405	43,698
Health Service Executive	112,790	107,421
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	1,022,876	1,017,723
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Expenditure		
Research Grants	166,537	281,430
Education & Promotion	58,523	100,269
Administration	96,182	94,677
Depreciation	6,843	3,967
Counselling	140,346	120,717
Staff Costs	373,241	329,042
Financial Expenses	6,445	4,866
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	848,117	934,968
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Surplus on ordinary activities	174,759	82,755

There are no recognised gains or losses other than the surplus or deficit for the above two financial years.



Balance Sheet As at 31 March 2007

	2007	2006
€	€	€
Fixed Assets		
Tangible assets	17,075	14,182
Investments	1	1
	17,076	14,183
Current Assets		
Stocks	3,288	4,252
Debtors and prepayments	166,669	261,185
Cash at bank and in hand	613,593	363,493
	783,550	628,930
Creditors (Amounts falling due within one year)	(499,635)	(515,569)
Net Current Assets	283,915	113,361
Total Assets Less Current Liabilities	300,991	127,544
Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year	(1,914)	(3,226)
Net Assets	299,077	124,318
Financed By :-		
Capital Account		
Research reserve	615,410	357,508
Income & expenditure deficit	(316,333)	(233,190)
Capital Account	299,077	124,318

Fighting Blindness

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Reg. Charity No: CHY6784

Fighting Blindness - An Irish Solution to a World Problem