# Chats About Apps: Technology for Independent Living Transcript

Voiceover: This podcast is brough to you by the RNIB Older People and Complex Needs team and the RNIB Technology for Life team. It is part of our Chats about Apps series. The information in this podcast will be helpful for people living with sight loss, sight loss and complex needs and for people who are supporting someone living with sight loss.

Linzi: Hello and welcome to podcast two in the series, Chats About Apps. This is our second podcast in this series and I’m with Hannah again today. Hi, Hannah!

Hannah: Hi, there!

Linzi: Hello, good to speak to you again! Thank you – as we said last time, Hannah’s from RNIB’s Technology for Life team. And I’m from the Older People and Complex Needs team and we’re chatting about apps – we’ve mentioned the last time about some of the features that apps may have and Hannah described clearly some of her top five features of apps for people living with sight loss and for people living with sight loss and complex needs.

So, just to recap on the top five features of apps, Hannah, you’d mentioned about independent living, communication, entertainment, life admin and travel. So, we’re going to dive deeper into each of those features and in this podcast, the one that we will start with, which is the very first one, on independent living. So, Hannah, if we’re thinking about independent living, could you give us some examples of what you mean by some of the features in apps in relation to independent living?

Hannah: Yeah, so for me, the first one would be being able to read printed materials. So, i.e. your post. So, personally for me, I have sight loss and I don’t have any central vision, so for me, being able to read anything is really difficult. I might manage a word or two but reading any, kind of, large document or any sort of letter is really challenging and there are some fantastic apps that use the camera on your smartphone or tablet. They take a picture of the letter or the text and then they’ll read it back to you. Yeah, so it’s fantastic - so for example, some of the apps that you can get are: Seeing AI, which is available on Apple products, and then there are other apps that are available on both Apple and Android. So, we’ve got Envision AI and Voice Dream Scanner. So, if you like, I can do a bit of a demo. So, here I’ve just got a letter today that I’ve received in the post and I’m going to open up the app. So, the app I’m going to use is Voice Dream Scanner.

(The app reads): Envision. Say colour. Files. 56 Voice Dream Scanner. (The app pings and opens). Image preview.

Hannah: So, you might think: ‘OK, well, I haven’t got enough vision to see the letter – what is it that I’m pointing at? And so, the apps have built in to them, sort of an ability to detect the edges. So, the apps do it in different ways. This app, when it can see all four corners of the page, it makes like a humming noise, so (app hums). App says: Capture image. Play. Adjustable.

Hannah: So, it made the humming noise and I touched the ‘take picture’ button and it’s taken a picture and now it’s on the ‘play’ button so if I tap the ‘play’ button, it’s going to read the letter.

(Hannah taps the 'play' button)

App reads: Dear Hannah, thank you for your letter. I can confirm that we have received all of your information and that we will be in touch soon.

Linzi: That’s brilliant, Hannah. It’s just so quick and is it quite simple to learn to use? Or does it come with instructions?

Hannah: Yeah, so most of these apps, most of the apps I mentioned come with instructions, so when you first open the app, it comes with information about how you use it. But yes, fairly straightforward in terms of there’s a button on the phone that, as you can hear there, I have the accessibility function turned on on my phone, so VoiceOver was reading aloud the buttons that appear on the screen, at the ‘take picture’ button, I double tapped to press the button and that was it – done! The apps are really designed to be straightforward and easy to use. Some of the apps - I mentioned Seeing AI – that one will automatically take the picture, so when it sees all four corners of the page, it’ll automatically take it so you don’t even have to press the button and that one will also give you directions – so if it can’t see one of the corners, it’ll say, you know, “left corner not visible” for example, and to tell you how to move the phone in order to get all four corners in full view of the camera.

Linzi: That sounds great. And are some of those apps that you mentioned – have they been around for years or are there new ones coming out every week? How would we know what ones are best for ourselves?

Hannah: They’re relatively new – with technology, it’s changing all the time, there are always new developments, new things coming out, new apps launching. So, the best thing to do is to keep an eye on resources like ours, so RNIB’s Technology for Life Resources Hub and also there are other websites, where you can go to find recommendations for the newest app that’s optimised for the latest technology and also you can contact our Technology for Life team, to find out any more information. Some of the apps are free, as we’ve mentioned in the previous podcast - it’s our favourite word! – so for example, Seeing AI is free but for other apps you will need to kind of, pay for, so that one I just demonstrated there’s an upfront fee of around about £5 . It’s also very much trial and error and what you prefer, so some people love one app and think it’s brilliant and then another app they just don’t get on with in terms of the layout with the screen or the way that is operates – just working out what is best for you.

Linzi: That’s a really good way of explaining it, as you say, Hannah, it’s what works best for you and one that works well for somebody may not work well for somebody else, that’s a good way to explain it. We just want to say as well, we’re not selling any of these apps, Hannah is just giving some examples, ‘cos like she said, there’s so many on the market. Some free, some you have to pay for, so these are just giving everyone some ideas.

That’s some great examples for apps for reading letters, or printed material. If we think about magnifiers and apps used for that. Hannah, could you explain some examples?

Hannah: Yeah, so there are some apps that turn your smartphone or smart device into a video magnifier. So, again, there are loads of different ones on the market and if you just type “magnifier” into the app store on your device then you’re going to be presented with lots of different ones with varying features and, again, it’s just persona preference about which one you find works best for you and does what you need it to do. So, depending on the app, you’ll be able to set different colours, magnify to different levels and again, it’s whatever you need and your preference. Video magnifiers can be really expensive so this is a good, cheaper alternative to getting a magnifier – a standalone magnifier. Also, more than that, they’re helpful for when you go out and about – so, I think we mentioned before that our bags are heavy enough already with all of the bits and bobs that we carry around in them. So, just having one device that does everything means that, your phone, is your magnifier when you go out and about as well as being your communication and a phone, and ability to read printed text as we’ve just shown. Also, a magnifier for in case that’s what you need, so you’re not carrying around ten different bits of equipment – you’ve just got the one. And it’s different pieces of equipment for different jobs and different tasks. So, it might be that you use your magnifier on your phone for reading certain things but then you find for reading other things, that doesn’t quite do it and you need another kind of magnifier for that. Just offering a different perspective. So, there’s a couple of good apps that I’ve used before, so one is called ClaroMagX and another one called VisionAssist that I’ve found have really clear interfaces and are really easy and simple to use but again, it’s personal preference and searching on the app store will bring up loads of ones for you to choose from.

Linzi: That’s some great examples there, again. And, like you’re saying, we can have so many different features and apps on our phone when we take out - we don’t want to have a handbag or a bag full of magnifiers or different devices, so that’s even better. We just need to remember to keep our phone charged - that’s always my problem, Hannah!

Hannah: Absolutely, yeah.

Linzi: If we think about independent living and how apps can help us live as independently as possible, if we’re thinking about sighted assistance, Hannah, how could an app help us with that?

HANAH: Yeah, so there’s a fantastic app called Be My Eyes and that’s available on both Apple and Android phones and what Be My Eyes does is you can make a video call to a sighted volunteer who uses the camera on your smartphone to help you with everyday tasks or anything that you’re stuck with. So, for example, somebody that I spoke to used it when he was doing his washing to identify the whites from the darks when he was putting his washing on. Somebody else uses it for the expiration day on the food in their fridge if they’re not quite sure – you know – “is this milk safe to put on my cornflakes in the morning?”, they use it for that. So, sometimes, as brilliant as technology is, you just need another person, you just need a good pair of eyes – if you’ve dropped something on the floor and you can’t find it, you can get out your phone and place a phone call to a volunteer who can be based anywhere around the world, who can then support you to find or identify whatever it is that you need.

Linzi: That’s a good top tip with an app there, I like the name of it: Be My Eyes. And as you say can help in day to day tasks – it can be something as simple as if you drop something they can help you find it again and that’s always useful – thanks, Hannah. And if we move on to thinking about identifying objects, have you got any examples or ones that you would like to speak about there?

Hannah: Yeah, so there are some great features in apps that allow you to identify what’s going on around you. So, I’ve already mentioned some fo the apps but, for example, Seeing AI and EnVision AI have a feature where you can take a picture - maybe of a scene or of an area and it will describe what’s in the picture to you. So, it’ll let you know what’s going on around you. There are also brilliant apps like TapTapSee and CamFind where, again, you can take a picture and it will tell you what’s in the picture, which is really great. These apps, so Seeing AI and EnVision AI, also have a feature where you can take a picture of a person and obviously name the photo and then whenever the app is open and he camera is in front of that person, it’ll read aloud their name. So, if we were together, Linzi, I know we’re in two different parts of the UK at the moment talking over the Internet! But if we were together and I came into the room and I wasn’t sure who was there and you were already in my phone, I could move the camera and it would read out your name and I would know that you were then in the room.

Linzi: That’s incredible! And does that take a while to set up, so would you have to take a picture of the person, tell them what you were doing and set up a sort of profile on it to say this is who it is?

Hannah: So, usually you’d take a picture of the person and then there’s a text box for you to write their name or whatever it is that you want the app to say when it sees that person and then you press ‘save’ and then that’s pretty much it done - it’s quite a straightforward process. Yeah, and that can be really helpful to people – not only who have very low vision and don’t know maybe who’s in the room with them but also in terms of people who have memory loss, memory and who struggle with remembering people’s names, that could be, kind of, really helpful in identifying who’s around them. These apps also can help with identifying objects, so, for example, EnVision AI has a feature where – for example, this morning, I’ve had my cup of tea and I do not know what I’ve done with my mug, it’s somewhere in the office here somewhere but I’m not quite sure where I’ve put it.

So, I’m going to head into the app (app clicks on) EnVision, describe scene, scan and find. Find person, find object (Hannah clicks ‘find object’). Favourites: Cup. Actions available: Finding cup.

Hannah: So, finding cup. So, now I’m just going to move my phone around the office where I’m in at the moment and it’s going to beep when it sees my cup. So, I’ve just been to the right and I haven’t found it so now I’m going to try the left. (app beeps). Ooh, it’s there! The phone’s vibrating and it’s making a beeping noise so I know my cup is now to the left of me and I’ve found it, I’ve got my cup now so I can go and have another cup of tea.

Linzi: Excellent, Hannah! That’s so clever isn’t it? It’s so brilliant what apps and technology can do these days.

Hannah: It is, it’s fantastic and it has, that app has a big, long list of things that it’ll identify and one that I am always losing is my remote control for my TV. I never know where that is! So, that app is really helpful in helping me locate what I’ve done with the remote control.

Linzi: That sounds like such a useful app for everyone.

Hannah: There’s also another great feature where apps like Seeing AI and EnVision AI will identify products by their barcode. So, this is particularly handy for things like tins or, you know, your shopping. So, tins all feel the same - but you want to make sure you’re putting your beans on your jacket potato rather than peaches or dog food! So, what happens is that when you have the app open, in the feature, it detects even the slightest little corner of a barcode – so, if you can’t see where the barcode is, you can move the product around for the camera to see it and if it identifies the smallest little portion it will start beeping. So, a bit like the parking sensor on a car so it will start off slow – but the more of the barcode it can see, it will get quicker, to tell you you’re getting close to the barcode - and when it sees enough of it to identify the product, it’ll automatically take a picture and then tell you what the item is.

(in-app): Seeing AI, Menu, Channel, Document, Product (beeps to select product).

Hannah: So, now I’m going to hold the product in front of the phone and I’m just going to start turning it.

(In-app): Processing. Napolitana Plum Tomatoes 400g.

Hannah: OK, so it saw the barcode, automatically took a picture and it automatically told me that these are my tinned tomatoes for my spag bol tonight.

Linzi: That’s a super example, Hannah and I like the idea of relating it to food as well. We especially want to know what’s in our tins, like you say, that’s super.

Hannah: Another great feature is the ability to identify colours. There are lots of great apps out there that have these features so, apps that I’ve already mentioned, so Seeing AI and EnVision AI, will do this. But also, you can just get colour identifying apps. If you type that into the app store, you’ll be presented with all different kinds of apps that will identify colour. And again, once you’re in the app, you point the camera towards the item - and it will identify the colour. So, this I find really helpful – so, generally, my colour vision isn’t too bad - but I struggle with darker colours in telling them apart and I once went and bought what I thought were a lovely pair of black trousers and I wore them out for the first time and my friend said to me: “Ooh, Hannah, I love your purple trousers!” So, it wasn’t quite what I was expecting! So, they’re very nice – they just weren’t what I was wanting to buy or what I was needing in my wardrobe! So, that app is really great in just, kind of, helping in the mornings, identify what it is you’re wearing and also over the years, I’ve worked with lots of very smart older ladies who are absolutely mortified that they’re wearing one blue shoe and one black shoe and again, it’s just, it’s a very small thing but it can make a big difference to kind of, how you feel about yourself when you’re going out and about, just that confidence that you are wearing and you are looking the way you’d like to.

Linzi: Yup, I’m sure many people have exactly the same what you’ve just said there, with two different shoes on, I’m sure we can all relate to that, Hannah! Thank you for all the examples that you’ve given there, Hannah. I’m sure we’ve all got lots of ideas and we’ll try some of these new apps out.

Our next podcast in this series, we’ll be speaking about features in relation to communication and we’ll look forward to that! Thank you Hannah.

Hannah: Thanks, Linzi!

Voiceover: If you found this helpful, listen to our other podcasts in our ‘Chats About Apps’ series. We have further information and support online relating to technology and apps from our Technology for Life team. You can find this by typing ‘technology resource hub’ into the search bar at the top of the RNIB webpage. For more information about working with people with sight loss and complex needs, go on to the RNIB website at rnib.org.uk. Type ‘complex needs’ in the search box at the right-hand side. You can also call RNIB Helpline on 0303 123 9999. We are the Older People and Complex Needs team and the Technology for Life team. For more information about what we do, search for us on the RNIB website. Thank you for listening.

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