**Apps Factsheet**

**What is it?**

App (short for application) is just another name for a computer program. They are generally used on mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets. Apps are developed and released all the time and there are numerous apps that have been specifically designed to make life easier or safer for people with a visual impairment. It can be difficult to keep up with the latest additions – the best bet is to link in with a dedicated visual impairment technology service that does know what’s out there and pick their brains!

**Some of the most popular and/or talked about apps for people with a visual impairment are:**

**Seeing AI**

Seeing AI is an ongoing research project by Microsoft. This free app uses artificial intelligence to recognise objects, people and text via a phone or tablet’s camera and describes them to the user. Currently only available on iOS.

It has several functions including converting text to speech, whether an A4 document or a short piece of text on some packaging; facial recognition; scene description; distinguishing currency; colour detection and a light detector. The latest feature to be added to the app is the handwriting mode, which is already demonstrating pretty impressive results. Internet connection is needed for some aspects of this app, including the document scanning function.

Watch AbiltyNet’s Robin Christopherson demonstrate Seeing AI, including a great tip for how to use your phone to capture a document and using the app to read handwriting: <https://www.facebook.com/AbilityNet/videos/1776556995690249/?query=Seeing%20AI>

More info and demo videos at:

<https://news.microsoft.com/en-gb/2017/11/15/microsofts-seeing-ai-app-for-visually-impaired-people-released-in-the-uk/>

**KNFB Reader**

KNFB Reader uses optical character recognition (OCR) to turn printed text into speech that is read aloud or into Braille if there is a connected Braille display. Gives feedback to help the user catch the whole document. Function to save documents within the app for playback later.

Available on Android, iOS and Windows 10 devices at a cost of about £99.99 – but worth contacting KNFB to negotiate getting a demo version (or a version where you can have a certain amount of ‘recognitions’ for free.) No internet connection is needed for this app.

More details at: <https://www.knfbreader.com/>

**Tap Tap See**

TapTap See utilises the device’s camera and VoiceOver functions to photograph objects and identify them out loud for the user. In TapTapSee, the user double-taps the device’s screen to photograph any two or three dimensional object at any angle, and have it accurately analysed and defined within seconds. The device’s VoiceOver then speaks the identification audibly to the user. Internet connection is needed for this app. Available on iOS and Android

More details at: <http://taptapseeapp.com/>

Comprehensive demo of Tap Tap See on You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cd4SPDUfJ-A>

**Be My Eyes**

Be My Eyes is a free app that connects blind or partially sighted users with sighted users via a live video connection. The blind or partially sighted user can request assistance with anything, from reading the expiry date on a carton of milk or a handwritten note to finding a specific item in a cupboard or navigating new surroundings. Sighted volunteers receive a notification when someone has requested help and once accepted a live video connection is established where help can be provided. Internet connection is needed for this app. The app is available for iOS and Android.

For more information: <https://www.bemyeyes.com/>

The BBC produced a 5 minute video on this particular app which can be viewed at the following link: [BBC World Service - How smartphones became ‘eyes’ for the blind](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04tq5w2)

**Be Specular**

Be Specular is similar to Be My Eyes but the user takes a photograph and leaves an audio message of what they want/need e.g. cooking instructions on a food packet. User can take multiple photos of the item to ensure all the required details are captured. Both the Be My Eyes and Be Specular apps could be used to read handwriting as optical character recognition scanners don’t recognise handwriting (although this seems to be changing with the new Handwriting Mode in the Seeing AI app).

This app is free and is available on iOS and Android. Internet connection is needed for this app.

More info: <https://www.bespecular.com/>

**BlindSquare**

BlindSquare is a GPS-app developed for people with a visual impairment. It describes the environment, announces points of interest and street intersections as the person travels. BlindSquare can be used in conjunction with other navigation apps such as Google Maps or iOS maps. These navigation apps can provide spoken turn-by-turn directions, while BlindSquare informs the person about their surroundings and upcoming street intersections. Internet connection is needed for this app.

More info at: <http://www.blindsquare.com/>

**Soundscape**

Soundscape is a very new app by Microsoft. They describe it as a research project that “…explores the use of innovative audio-based technology to enable people, particularly those with blindness or low vision, to build a richer awareness of their surroundings, thus becoming more confident and empowered to get around.” Soundscape works by providing information about a person’s surroundings with synthesized binaural audio, creating the effect of 3D sound. It can run in the background in conjunction with navigation or other applications to provide additional context about the environment. The phone tracks movement using location and activity sensors, enabling an individual to move toward a self-set audio beacon.

Soundscape runs on iOS (iPhone 5S or later) and is compatible with most wired or Bluetooth stereo headsets. Internet connection is needed for this app.

More info at: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/research/product/soundscape/>

You Tube videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fiu4eecCqTY&feature=youtu.be>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCIcgzCgj0Y&feature=youtu.be>

**MD eReader**

A collaborative project between Royal Holloway University of London and the Macular Society. This app has been designed to help those who use eccentric fixation and/or steady eye technique for reading. It enables eBook text to be scrolled in a single line, much like a ticker tape. User can change the colour of the background, size and colour of the text and the speed at which it scrolls. The text can be scrolled forwards or backwards. The app also includes a feature which can place a fixation point on the screen to help people to use their best point of vision. This app can be used for reading eBooks or just practicing eccentric viewing and steady eye strategy.

For more information on how to use this app and how to find and download free eBooks: <https://www.macularsociety.org/sites/default/files/downloads/MD%20evReader%20instructions.pdf>

**What further information and support is out there?**

* Facebook groups e.g. the public group: iPhone and iPad apps for the Blind and Visually Impaired
* RNIB Technology for Life can help with complex technology queries and issues on the phone, over email and through setting up a volunteer request. Contact a Technology for Life Coordinator via the RNIB Helpline on: 0303 123 9999 or via email: tfl@rnib.org.uk
* Henshaws Knowledge Village – this voluntary organisation’s website has information and videos about some of the most popular apps for people with visual impairment: <https://www.henshaws.org.uk/apps/>
* SITE Scotland (Supported Integration Training and Education) have some useful technology resources on their website including a blog post called Top Ten Apps 2017. Website is: <http://www.sitescotland.org/> Link to assistive technology factsheet: <http://www.sitescotland.org/resources-information/fact-sheets/technology-factsheet/> Link to members’ blog post about top 10 apps: <http://www.sitescotland.org/top-ten-apps-2017/>
* Check out if your local visual impairment voluntary organisation has a technology coordinator and / or offers technology support and / or technology user groups.
* Loads of tutorials and reviews on You Tube – just search for the name of the app.