

Webinar: Assistive technology for adults with sensory impairments

[00:00]

Radha Smith:

Welcome to this webinar by Community Care Inform Adults about assistive technology for adults with sensory impairments. I'm Radha Smith, the assistant content editor on Community Care Inform Adults and I'm pleased to introduce our presenters this morning: Hannah Rowlatt, technology for life coordinator at RNIB, Jesal Vishnuram, technology adviser at RNID, and Tim Locke, digital inclusion officer at Deafblind UK, who is joined by Roger Wilson-Hinds, a trustee at Deafblind UK.

I will hand over to our brilliant presenters shortly. Before I do that, I just want to go through a bit of housekeeping to help you make the most of this webinar.

There are two links in the description box. The first link allows you to view live captions. This opens in a new window, which you can shrink and place above the main presentation window.

The second link allows you to ask a question using BSL. This opens a Zoom meeting which you will be able to ask questions in. You can click the link to enter this meeting at any time and you will be in the waiting room until the Q and A starts around 11:45.

You can also type questions via the 'ask a question' button under the presentation screen. You can type a question at any time and I will collect these to ask during the Q and A.

If you are asking a question and you would like us not to share your name or organisation, please prefix your question with 'anon'.

And if you would like to make the presentation full-screen you can click on the icon in the bottom corner of the slideshow.

Without further ado I will now hand over first to Hannah who will talk about assistive technology for adults who are blind or partially sighted.

[01:45]

Hannah Rowlatt:

Thank you very much, and hello everybody. So yes, my name is Hannah Rowlatt, and I'm part of RNIB's technology for life team. Technology for life is a UK-wide service providing advice, information and support to blind and partially sighted

people, their friends, family, and professionals who want to learn more about technology for sight loss. So technology is such a vast massive subject and so what I have decided to do today is just to mention three of the top things that we get asked most often and to go through those.

So the first thing people ask us is: how can somebody with sight loss use a smart device? So a smartphone or a tablet. So probably not far away from any of you we've got these, they're just part of our lives now, there's probably within a hand's reach you can reach a smart device, and all Android and all Apple products come with built-in accessibility features. So these features can be found by going to 'settings' and then 'accessibility'. And there are loads of different things in here to do with lots of different things but I'm just going to mention three different types of settings you will find in these devices.

So the first is around the visual display. So visual enhancements and things that you can do. So these settings include things like making the text larger or changing the display colours, the contrast, the brightness, to make the phone easier to see.

The other feature that you'll find in these technologies is a magnifier, or 'magnification'. So on an Android device it's called 'magnification' and on an Apple device it's called 'zoom'. What this accessibility feature allows you to do is to zoom in on particular items on the screen to make them bigger. So even though we can enlarge the text it doesn't enlarge all the little icons and things on the screen. The zoom or the magnification will allow you to zoom in to make that bigger. And that will work on the top of whatever app or whatever feature you are in on your smartphone or tablet.

The third setting, built into the smartphones that you can get anywhere, just from the high street, is a screen reader. For those of you who don't know what a screen reader is, it does exactly what it says on the tin, and it reads aloud what is written on the screen. And you can get screen readers for all different sorts of technology including desktops and laptops that you would largely control with your keyboard. But on a smart device, when the screen reader is turned on – so on an Android device it's called 'TalkBack' or 'voice assistant' and on an Apple device it's called 'VoiceOver' – so when it's turned on and you touch the screen, it will read what's under your finger. So that can mean, you know, if you were to touch an app it will tell you what the app is, or if you were to receive an email, or a text message it would read aloud the contents of that message you received. You can also control the voice by doing a combination of flicks and swipes on the screen with your finger to move the voice around. So even if you have no sight at all

you can still control the voice to get access to the device and the information. And just like the magnification and zoom feature, it will work on top of any other app you want to access. So it will work on top of social media apps, on top of banking apps, on top of any shopping apps. It does struggle with some games and some picture-based apps because there's nothing for it to grab on to to read aloud, but there are lots and lots of apps it will work with to make the devices kind of lovely and accessible and easy to use.

The second thing we get asked a lot about are apps for everyday living. So it's great, I've got my smartphone and it's reading aloud all my information – can I use it to help me with all those little annoying things that happen every day that I can't get access to because of my vision? So there are some specialist apps out there on the market – and there are loads of these, so I'm just going to mention a couple today.

So there are apps – an app that's called Seeing AI which is available on Apple devices, and an app that's called Lookout, by Google, that's available on Android devices. And these apps are fairly similar in how they operate. They have built into them lots different features. One of which is that it will read you aloud printed material. So if you were to receive a letter through the post, or maybe you're out at a restaurant having a meal, it will read you the menu, or again read you a newspaper, and it does this by utilising the camera on the back of the smartphone or tablet so when you go into the app and point it at whatever medium you are wanting to get read aloud, it will scan it and take a picture and then read aloud the content to you. Meaning that you are able to get access to that printed material that you might not otherwise be able to see. Both those apps can also identify products. So if you have, say, two cans of food from your cupboard, they both feel the same and you may be struggling to tell them apart – one's your baked beans and one's your peaches, you want to make sure you're having the right one for your dinner, whatever it is you choose to have for your dinner, and so these apps will use the barcode and scan the product and then tell you what it is to make sure you're eating what it is you choose to eat instead of 'pot luck' whatever you manage to open.

Another absolutely fantastic app that is really well used and loved is called Be My Eyes. Be My Eyes is a video calling app where you can connect to a sighted volunteer or to a specialist organisation to ask for help. So again this app utilises the camera on your smartphone and the volunteer will see whatever it is you point the camera at. So that could be anything – it could be, "I've dropped something on the floor and I can't find it." It could be, "Could you help me with what the expiration date is on my milk?" Or, "I've got a pair of blue

shoes and a pair of black shoes, are they both the same colour? Because you know, I don't want to be going out with one one colour and one another.” So really, anything. And that's an absolutely fantastic service. It's available throughout the world so you know, you could be as a user placing a call to anybody in a different country, there's always somebody awake who can help, and also as a user you could be speaking to anybody throughout the world who'd be willing to help you. As I mentioned a moment ago, they also have a specialist organisation help where you can place a call and you go straight in to speak to a trained member of staff. So organisations like Google, Microsoft, Clearblue and NHS, the NHS track and trace are available through there where you are actually placing a call to a trained member of staff through the app.

The third thing we get asked a lot about is about smart speakers. People absolutely love their smart speakers because they're very easy to get to grips with. Once they're set up, what could be easier than just using your voice to get access to information throughout your house? So you could, you know – they're fantastic – not only use them to play music or to play quizzes or things like that, but also you can use them to control your lighting, your heating, to speak to people who are calling, have a video doorbell where you can use it as an intercom to check who's at your front door before you go and answer it. So these smart speakers have really revolutionised for a lot of people in promoting independence.

So there are our top three things that we get asked most about at the moment.

When I was talking to Radha about this session she also asked if I could talk a little bit about how to support people to use technology – that there's quite a lot of technology abandonment. So really what I would say in terms of that is that everybody is different, everybody's sight is different and even two people with the same sight condition will see two completely different things. So it's very much about finding the right tool for the person and also what it is they're wanting to do with it. So no two people's sight is the same, but also there isn't a one-size-fits-all in terms of technology. Sometimes there's a little bit of exploration in finding out what the right thing is for the individual. And you know, a bit of trial and error.

Another thing to say is that for a lot of people, sight loss itself is perceived as a barrier to why they can't use technology. So regardless of what it is – for the things I have mentioned today, the general products, lots of people think, “Well I've lost my sight, I can't – I can't do it because I've lost my sight, so how can I?” Even though the wonderful technology exists and is

here. So some of it is about building people's confidence, encouragement, and also reassurance that the technology is here to support and there are great support services and organisations that can help along the journey to adopting technology.

And then finally about being realistic about what the technology can do. So it's amazing, it's fantastic, it can be absolutely transformative in people's lives and really promote independence. And these kinds of apps I have talked about and these features are revolutionary for a lot of people. But then, you know, this technology can't regain your sight. And I know a lot of people who purchase products thinking it's going to, you know, do the cleaning and the washing up and all of that stuff and it's the answer to everything, whereas as we all know sometimes when we're talking to Alexa or to Siri they'll come back and say, "Oh, I can't help you with that." So some of it is about communicating the realistic expectations of what tech can do and how it can be amazing but it also comes with its trials and tribulations.

So finally just before I end I just wanted to say that RNIB we have on our website – if you were looking for more information – we have a technology resources hub that obviously goes into a lot more detail than I've been able to say today. And you can find that by going to rnib.org.uk. And on there obviously is our contact details as well so please feel free to get in contact and look more into that. Thank you very much for listening to me today.

[13:08]

Jesal Vishnuram:

I'm Jesal Vishnuram, I'm the technology adviser at RNID. My role is to ensure that RNID provides the most up-to-date and trusted information on assistive and accessible technology for people with hearing loss, who are deaf, and have tinnitus. RNID as a charity, we're the largest charity supporting people with hearing loss, deafness and tinnitus.

There are currently about 12 million people with hearing loss – that's about one in five people. So that's a lot of people with some form of hearing loss. The majority of these hearing losses are with older adults, so roughly about 70% of people with hearing loss are over the age of 70 – so that's a big part of who we support.

The biggest risk factor for developing hearing loss is at the moment age, but it's not the only factor. There are other things that can affect hearing. The biggest growing concern for developing hearing loss is exposure to loud noise, and that's largely to do with exposure to loud noise through listening to music on your personal devices.

The best way to manage hearing loss is through the use of hearing aids. They amplify sounds based on your individual hearing loss. Hearing aids are designed to pick up speech and reduce background noise, however like Hannah said there are limitations to all technologies and while they can work really well in most situations, when you get into situations where there's a little a bit more noise, a few more people talking, they can sometimes struggle. And then in these situations assistive devices are really useful.

For people with more severe hearing losses, hearing aids have its limitations, and these people could benefit from cochlear implants. This is an implantable device which replaces the function of your organ of hearing, but it's only considered when there's very limited benefit from hearing aids.

I'm going the focus today mostly on technology for hearing loss, which is designed to make speech clearer in background noise. This is done by trying to reduce the background noise as much as possible and really focusing on the speech sound that you want to hear. There are lots of different technologies so again I'm going focus on some of the most common ones.

The most used assistive device for hearing loss is something called a loop or a telecoil system. This was first developed over 80 years ago but it's still the most used piece of tech. It was designed for use on the telephone but it's since then been adapted so that you can find it in most public spaces. You will see a little picture of an ear with a 'T' symbol next to it and that indicates that there's a loop system available. It comes in two parts. There's a microphone that the person speaks into, and then this is transmitted to the person who's either wearing a hearing aid on the telecoil setting or someone with a telecoil receiver and headphones. These are really useful in places like lecture halls where the speaker is really far away, or when someone is speaking through a glass barrier like when you're at the bank. It's also found on mobiles and smartphones. As Hannah mentioned, you'll see in the accessibility folder there is also a section for hearing loss, and in there you'll often find that there's a setting to switch on the loop system where you can hear the sound from your phone into your hearing aid with the loop.

Other most common type of assistive device is something called a remote microphone. Hearing aids and cochlear implants have microphones on them, but simply based on where they're positioned, which is on top of the ear, when you're outside they will pick up all sounds equally; and while they're very good at trying to reduce steady sounds like noise and pick up on the speech, they have limitations just simply based on where it's placed. So for this, a remote microphone is

really useful. A remote microphone is placed closer to the person or the people you are trying to talk to, and therefore the speech signal is clearer than the background noise. These are most commonly used with hearing aids and cochlear implants; however you can get remote microphones that can be used with headphones as well.

The next most common type of technology is telephones. These can be amplified landline and mobile phones. These will have features like a loud ringing sound so that you can hear your phone when it rings, as well as functions to turn the volume up and louder when you're making phone calls. For people who have hearing aids and cochlear implants, you can buy phones that connect directly to your device, or you can have standalone devices as well. As I mentioned, smartphones will have accessibility features which will help you hear better and for anyone using hearing aids and cochlear implants you can connect these directly to your device. This can be done through, as I mentioned with a loop, also through a cable as well as Bluetooth technology. Newer hearing aids and cochlear implants will be able to connect via Bluetooth directly through the device. And then some of the older ones you may have to use an intermediary device called a streamer.

Television. The most commonly used assistive tech for television is subtitles. However, these aren't, unfortunately, always available. Other features that can help are TVs' accessibility features, and sometimes this will allow you to reduce the background noise and turn up the speech. And for TVs that don't allow this, you can use something called a TV streamer. The TV streamer will connect the audio again directly to your hearing aid or cochlear implant, or through headphones if you don't have one of these devices. They will also typically allow you to adjust the sound a little bit to your hearing level as well.

You can also get alerting devices. These are devices that give you an increased audio signal, a visual signal or a vibrating signal if you are struggling to hear this alerting device. This can be things for like doorbells, smoke alarms, fire alarms and alarm clocks. For safety-critical alerts like fire and smoke alarms, you will need to get this either through your local fire department or your local authority. For other devices like alarm clocks and doorbells, what this will do is if you're struggling to hear the sound it will give you either a vibrating or a visual alert when this goes off, so that you know someone's at your door or when your alarm clock goes off.

The next really popular type of technology is speech-to-text. Now this can be really useful, like subtitles, when you're struggling to hear what someone is saying to be able to read

what is being said. There are two types of speech-to-text. There is automated speech-to-text, where this is generated automatically through our software. And then there's another speech-to-text where a person types what is being said.

For automated speech-to-text it's usually really helpful for when you're out and about and you're really stuck and you need some help very quickly. However, you'll find that the accuracy and the speed of the transcript is really dependent on the internet connection, the accent of the person who's speaking and the level of background noise. If these conditions are not right, the accuracy and the delay for the captions can be really quite poor.

For these reasons, they are not a regulated service and therefore should only be used if you're in a situation where information is not critical. So for things like health appointments, financial services and work you should use a regulated speech-to-text support. So this is the form of a person who's translating speech to text for you.

For phone calls, you can use a free-of-charge service from BT called Relay UK, and this is where a person will transcribe the phone call for you into text for you to be able to read.

I just want to finish off by talking a little bit about the funding. So unfortunately for adults, funding is very limited for all of these types of technology. For people who are still in work, there is something called Access to Work, which will fund this equipment for you. But outside of this, unfortunately as I said, the funding is extremely limited. Some social services in certain areas will cover the costs of some basic equipment, but this is really dependent on where you live, and unfortunately most people are having to pay for assistive devices themselves.

Just a little bit more if you're looking for more information, I just want to signpost you to the RNID website, where we have a bit more about these technologies. And then also we're working in partnership with Connevans, who have lots of different assistive devices that can help you. So if you are interested, it's always worth having a look at the Connevans website as well.

[21:50]

Tim Locke:

Thank you very much, guys, for inviting us along today on this assistive technology webinar, and a warm welcome to everybody who's actually chosen to join us. Much thanks there to Hannah and Jesal. That was really informative. I always really love these sessions 'cause I end up writing down a lot of

information myself that I don't know, that I can take away with me, which is really, really great.

So today I'm actually, well I should say, my name is Tim, Tim Locke, and I work at Deafblind UK and I'm the digital inclusion officer at Deafblind UK. I'm joined today by my colleague Roger, Roger Wilson-Hinds, and today I would just really like to talk to Roger. We're going to play this a little bit differently. I'd just like to get his thoughts, really, and lived experiences as a deafblind person who uses technology. So we might sort of bring it down a little bit more into some of the actual technology that he uses every day.

So shall I just dive straight in, Rog?

Roger Wilson-Hinds: Yes, dive away, ask away.

Tim Locke: Okay. Well I think the obvious question is, what tech do you use? What equipment do you use in your daily life?

Roger Wilson-Hinds: Okay. So I think my job here is to add on to what you've heard already. I use the technology as applicable to a blind person or a partially sighted person, and I use technology applicable to a person with significant, possibly severe hearing loss as well. So I've got a few bits by me which I can use to illustrate.

I'm a senior. I do have significant seeing and hearing loss but I see a bit, and to me it's very useful, I hear quite a lot, and that's very useful, but I get into all sorts of embarrassing situations where either sense doesn't work properly for me.

So this 'deafblind' label is a very blurred kind of label. We might think there are perhaps 300,000 or 400,000 deafblind people in the country, mostly seniors. Deafblind UK I'm a trustee of. We have about 4,000 members. So we're getting there.

So the first thing I'm holding up is braille. Very few people use braille but I was fortunate to learn as a youngster. If you have braille at your fingertips it keeps you going with reading and writing, even if you can't hear at all. And that's vital. So that's a big difference between what we've heard from Hannah before. Braille, if you can't hear at all, is absolutely vital. That's the first thing.

The next thing I have is a magnifier. This is a precious thing for people with poor sight, losing their sight. It's better if it's medically diagnosed, prescribed for the individual. This one I've got here is very powerful, and my sight is bad now so it's hardly useful at all to me. But it really is sometimes, and over the years it's been a friend. I've had this magnifier since, oh, 1970-odd. So it's a precious part of the life of a partially sighted person.

Hannah mentioned smartphones. I've brought a smartphone. Probably you can't see much of it. I have to tap a screen and make it behave for me. I hope you can see something of that. So I've tapped the bottom of the screen. "What time is it?" [phone clicks] It'll tell me.

Tim Locke:

It's always the way. We wait in anticipation.

Roger Wilson-Hinds:

[electronic voice from phone] "The time is 28 minutes past 11am on Tuesday April 26th 2022."

I can read a magazine or a book or whatever. I tap again. "Read *The Guardian*."

[electronic voice] "This is *The Guardian* from today. The first page of 48. Unread headlines from the news section. One. 44. *Elon Musk wins fight to take over Twitter*."

So it's the same boring news! But it's good. It means I can read a selection of literally 70 newspapers. I tend to read *The Guardian* – sorry about that if it's a bias. And I can choose books from the RNIB library and something called the Calibre library. I've got literally 40,000 or 50,000 books I can choose from, just by tapping and saying what I want to. But it's audio, so I must retain some hearing to do that. If I lose my hearing I'll have to read braille books. And that's not a bad thing, really.

Shall I keep going, Tim?

Tim Locke:

This is fantastic, Roger. Yeah, no, I mean, it's really fascinating.

[electronic voice interrupts]

Sometimes she's persistent, isn't she?

Roger Wilson-Hinds:

Headphones are precious in my life. I love music.

Tim Locke:

It's always the danger with technology. We get it started, then we can't stop it!

Roger Wilson-Hinds:

Can't stop it. Same with children!

Tim Locke:

You carry on with the headphones and I'll come back and ask my question in a sec.

Roger Wilson-Hinds:

Headphones are precious to me. To hear what's going on in this webinar I have powerful hearing aids in each ear, and on top of the hearing aids I have good quality headphones. And then I can hear the discussion and more or less follow it, not missing out on many words. But if I'm out in the street I don't know who I'm talking to, if I'm in a noisy café I've no idea what's going on. I don't know whether I'm getting my latte or a Coke or whatever it is. It's getting more and more embarrassing as the years go by.

And just one other thing to mention which is not technology. Those of you joining who use sign language, you've got a real live language, something fabulous. The deafblind person's equivalent is using our hands. We need to touch each other, and I would have to... "I... would... have... to... speak... like that." Slowly, word by word. I'd need to be able to spell. It's tedious, it's not as good as the living language of sign language. But needs must. If I get to the stage where I can't hear at all, then I will have to communicate with people in that kind of way.

So that's just a little bit of technology in our lives as deafblind people. Tim.

Tim Locke:

That's fantastic, Roger. Thank you. Brilliant. Yes, what we were talking about at the end there is the deafblind manual, I believe, and it's one of the methods of communication that we can have with people who are living with deafblindness. And there are actually quite a few different forms of communication there.

It's really interesting, Roger, isn't it because we're building on what we've heard from Jesal and Hannah. And Hannah was saying right at the beginning, broadly speaking, there's so much inbuilt into technology today that allows us to personalise the technology, whether they be smartphones or tablets, PCs, to meet that vision loss and hearing loss. So people can enjoy technology as much as the next person. And you sort of demonstrated that a little bit there.

I guess the question is what we've gone on a little bit further there is some additional, specialist adaptations on devices that can be added to work with some of those inbuilt tools that are already there, aren't they? So let's just look at that braille machine, for example. And as a brailist, obviously for deafblind people, and particularly deafblind people who are at the far end of the spectrum who have little sight and little hearing, who are able to braille, then obviously they can use that as the input and the output mechanism. Just out of interest, how do you use your braille device? So what devices do you connect it to, and what type of activities do you perform with it?

Roger Wilson-Hinds:

I take it to church with me every Sunday and I can follow the hymns and the prayers and so on. It hangs around my neck on a landline and I feel the braille under my fingers. I can connect it to an iPhone – or I could connect it to an Android phone – and I can follow what the phone is doing, the various apps. I can read a text with it in braille under my fingers. It's good.

Tim Locke:

And the talking device that you just demonstrated there, is that a regular smartphone or is that a specially designed phone that has specially adapted tools that runs on it?

- Roger Wilson-Hinds: Yeah, it's actually an Android phone which has been totally adapted for this straightforward purpose. The only thing you can use this phone for is using your voice and giving it commands and listening.
- Tim Locke: Yeah.
- Roger Wilson-Hinds: And perhaps to answer the question you've almost asked, the trick is if I buy an iPhone and I've got no knowledge, it's no use to me whatsoever as a deafblind person. It has to be set up, it has to be customised. I have to be taught to understand what needs to be done. So you either go through the mill and learn to use a mainstream with lots of effort and learning or you buy something which is specialist and made easy.
- Just for instance, to read print, Hannah mentioned Seeing AI. If you know what to do you could point your iPhone at some print and it'll talk to you. If you don't know the technology you can buy a box, you lift the lid, and you put the printed word under the lid on the glass, put the lid down, press the right button and it reads to you. And that you can use if you've got no technology knowledge.
- Tim Locke: So from your experience, to support the learning, to support the development – and I guess this comes into areas of challenges with technology, and as Hannah was mentioning as well, we have to recognise that there are sometimes limitations. Sometimes technology isn't always the answer. And of course there's a whole other side of getting the right type of technology for the individual. But that education, that learning and development, the support of friends, family, other organisations is really important, yeah?
- Roger Wilson-Hinds: Yeah. I would say for people listening and joining in this, if you're broadly associated with somebody who you think has got seeing and/or hearing or both difficulties, please, please get on your hands and knees and beg them to take the technology seriously. 'Cause it's not easy for them.
- I'll illustrate with hearing aids. If you're new to a hearing aid it's a dreadful experience. It's tinny, noisy, it magnifies all the wrong sounds and it drives you up the wall and you're tempted to put it in the drawer. If you persist, you can start to get some benefit. So please encourage your people to go for the technology. It's worth it. It's worth the investment of time and effort.
- Tim Locke: Breaking down the fear factor a little bit is very important, isn't it? And as you've always said in the past, it's just giving it a try, really. And I know, 'cause we've had these type of conversations before, it's always on the top of your list on the desert island question, isn't it? What piece of tech would you

take with you on your desert island? Number one is always your hearing aids, actually.

Roger Wilson-Hinds: It's always my hearing aids. I can't use the rest without my hearing aid. And I don't begrudge paying a lot of money for the hearing aids. They're so valuable to me. And I don't have a car expense so I spend my money on the hearing aid.

Tim Locke: But again it's about...depending on the type of hearing loss you have and the level of hearing loss one has can depend on the type of hearing aids that will work best.

Before we probably finish here...well actually, Roger, let me ask you this question then. 'Cause we are...ten minutes, fifteen minutes goes so quickly, doesn't it? I can think of a thousand other questions that we can ask. But look, let's have a think about this. Practice tips for people to take away today on how best to support people with technology that's right for them. If you were to have two or three top practice tips, what would you say?

Roger Wilson-Hinds: I'll go for one, 'cause we haven't got much time.

Tim Locke: Okay!

Roger Wilson-Hinds: What I would say, when you're talking to somebody about technology the most important thing is to get them to think and write down or tell you what they want to achieve. That will focus the mind. If you want to listen to books, there are several ways to do it. If you want to go out and about to the pub and you're frightened, you're not good in the streets, put that down and get the appropriate technology. Don't just get a wonderful shiny iPhone and hope it'll solve your problems 'cause without a lot of thinking and training and learning it won't.

Tim Locke: I think that's really interesting, actually, 'cause that echoes some of the personalised approaches that we have within the technology support project that we run to support our members. I find that when we're working with them, the experiences are very much around essentially having that individual conversation with the person, understanding the impact that the combined sight and hearing loss has on them, because that can have quite a different impact from perhaps somebody who might be experiencing a single sensory loss.

And then, as you say, looking at what technology perhaps they currently have, assessing very importantly what they want to do with that technology, what they want to achieve. Perhaps what they currently know or don't know. And around that whole context really, just support them with personalising it to achieve their aims. And of course that means bringing in additional solutions sometimes that we need to do.

Roger Wilson-Hinds: Yeah.

Tim Locke: So yeah, that's pretty much it in terms of, I think, our experience with deafblind people. Any final thoughts you want to leave there then, Rog?

Roger Wilson-Hinds: It's not bad being partially deaf and partially blind. It's not a bad way of life. It's pretty good. I enjoy the tech, I enjoy going out and about every day. My big challenge is to keep up with information, not to miss out on things. I've always got that dilemma. It's sometimes easier to sit and drift rather than try and keep up with the conversation. When I'm with a crowd of people I hear, "Bla-bla-bla-bla-bla-bla," and occasional words which are meaningful to me. So it's quite a challenge. Don't stop. You've got to keep going.

Tim Locke: Yeah. No, that's absolutely brilliant. And I might actually try and leave with a final thought as well. I don't think I can top that one, really. It's a bit of an odd thing to say but it's just come into my head really, and we mentioned earlier sometimes technology isn't always the solution for our members, and I just recall a conversation I had recently with a member. They have many what we call 'talking lifestyle' products in the house, so talking egg-timers, blood pressure monitors and so on. But this particular thing struck me. They really had begun struggling with the voices of some of these appliances in the house. So the pitches just didn't work for their hearing loss, and they needed to rely on the voices obviously for their vision loss. So they actually got a talking microwave oven and the audio just wasn't working for them. But what they noticed on that microwave oven was that the temperature gauge just had a very distinct pitch click on it when the temperature adjustment went up to 80 and 90 and so on. So in actual fact they ditched the technology and the synthetic voice and they just worked with the click pitch to guide them on the actual oven. So I thought that was a really nice example. It's slightly the antithesis of what we've been talking about with technology, but sometimes you know, the simple things work.

Roger Wilson-Hinds: I've got a lovely radio and I count the clicks to find the station. I twist the knob and count the clicks.

Tim Locke: Exactly.

Roger Wilson-Hinds: It'd be lovely if it spoke to me but it doesn't, so I count the clicks.

Tim Locke: Yeah. That's it. We just live and learn every day really, don't we?

Roger Wilson-Hinds: Yeah.

Tim Locke: Thank you, Roger.

Roger Wilson-Hinds: Thanks, Tim.

Tim Locke: Well thank you very much for that. That was great stuff.
Keep your audio on, I think.

[38:10]

Radha Smith: Thank you so much, Tim and Roger, for that great conversation. So we now have time for questions. We've had quite a few questions come through in the chat box and we also have a few people in the waiting room of the Zoom call who will be asking questions via BSL. So I'm just going to admit everybody who's in that room. I will read out a couple of the questions from the chat box just to let everybody enter this room, and then we'll come to the Zoom room in a moment.

So a couple of you had a question about whether this session will be recorded and viewable afterwards, and yes it will be available. If you're an Inform Adults subscriber you'll be able to see it on catch-up.

So we have a couple of questions about the apps that you mentioned, Hannah. Some people wanted to know if you could mention the names of the apps again, and in particular the magnifying app. They wanted to know, "What magnifier app can you recommend from feedback?"

[39:37]

Hannah Rowlett: Okay. So the particular apps that I mentioned, so we've got the apps that can identify products and also scan and read printed material. So if it's an Apple product then it's called Seeing AI. And 'AI' as in artificial intelligence, not E-Y-E. So 'Seeing AI'. And if it's an Android phone it's called Lookout by Google. I also mentioned the app Be My Eyes.

And then in terms of magnification, so there's a built-in magnifier to all smartphones and tablets. So if it's an Apple smartphone or tablet then you would head into 'settings' and then 'accessibility', and it's called 'zoom'. And if it's an Android device then you can again head into 'settings' and then 'accessibility'. It's called, depending on the version of Android phone you have, sometimes it's called 'magnifier', sometimes it's called 'magnification'. And then you'll be able to turn that on and use that on the screen.

I'm not sure if you maybe meant, whoever the question-asker was, if you maybe meant an app which turns your smart device into a magnifier. There are apps that do this. So the iPhone has one built in. Again in accessibility there's 'magnifier', and what that does is it means that it again uses the camera on

your smartphone to turn your device or iPad into a magnifier that you can use to read physical things.

There are lots of different...if you just go into the app store, to be honest, on either device and type 'magnifier' in, you'll find loads of different ones pop up. And again, really I guess it's kind of like the theme of today's session, I think we've all mentioned it in our sessions, it's about finding the right thing for the right person. And so sometimes it's a bit of trial and error. Some people prefer some apps to others in terms of magnifiers. So again it's just having a go, basically, and seeing what works for you or works for the people you're supporting.

[41:56]

Radha Smith: Thank you, Hannah. I just wanted to let you know that if you are in the Zoom call to ask a question using BSL, please turn your video on and we will come back to that in a minute. If you could turn your video on, that would be great.

Okay, wonderful. So we have a question from Lucy Allen, from Lincolnshire County Council. Lucy asks, "What support services are out there to help people learn how to use technology and increase their confidence?" Jesal, would you like to start?

Jesal Vishnuram: Sorry, I missed the first part of the question.

Radha Smith: Yeah, so Lucy is asking about support services. So what support services are out there to help people learn how to use technology and increase their confidence?

Jesal Vishnuram: So I think for mainstream technology a lot of the providers are trying really hard to support people who have never used technology and are quite new to technology. So you'll find for laptops and things like that, Microsoft are quite helpful. If for smartphones you go into the stores they can provide you with lots of information as well as online support. There are a few charities that help do that. So I know RNIB, like we do, we have community-based services where you can talk to volunteers who might be able to help. And then there's also AbilityNet, who's another charity, and they do a lot of work with helping people even in their homes to get really comfortable using technology as well.

Radha Smith: Thanks, Jesal. Hannah, did you have anything to add?

Hannah Rowlett: Yeah. So just to kind of reiterate really what Jesal has said, AbilityNet are a great kind of organisation that can provide services. And then you've got, I guess, like all of us here on the call. We all have support services that we offer. So we have a telephone helpline. People can call in to get support

and also volunteers who can go out and support people in the community.

I guess the other angle I would say is that up and down the country there are loads of fantastic local organisations for people with sight loss – local societies. So again, kind of search in your area to see what's available. There's a website which is called the Sightline Directory. So if you Google 'Sightline' there'll be a list of... basically it's like a database of organisations across a country that provide support for people with sight loss. So you can kind of head there to see if there are any services near where you are in the UK.

Radha Smith:

Great. Thanks, Hannah. Tim, did you have anything to add?

Tim Locke:

They've pretty much covered it there. Certainly some of the larger organisations, I mean, AbilityNet I was going to mention, and the RNIB of course, with Hannah. And of course the RNID, Jesal's organisation. And Connevens, actually, we find a wonderful source of... and very knowledgeable staff when we are given advice on hearing products and hearing accessories. And particularly on, well, all types of technologies, particularly the ones that Jesal was mentioning today – landline telephones, conversational listeners, neck-loops. We do use them a lot.

Of course there is our own technology service that we have as well. I think I probably should mention that. Hannah alluded to it. Didn't quite mention it in our little podcast there. But we do support our members nationally who are deafblind. We can give out all the contact details for sure at the end. We do have an inbox, which is digitalinclusion@deafblind.org.uk, and we're happy to receive any types of queries into that, both from members but also from people who support in the wider community deafblindness. And we do get a lot of queries coming into that inbox, particularly from local authorities, from support workers, carers as well.

And you know, we will then try our best to deal with those queries. We often support through email or telephone or video remotely on that type of stuff.

We do try to do other things as well. So we run webinars every other week where we invite people in who are experts in their fields to talk about the relevant technologies, as well as trying to run one-to-one support as well.

And I would also probably echo what Hannah has said there, very much so. Because we are national and because quite a lot of our technology services are remote, the only real face-to-face can be done in the areas where I'm kind of centred, which is the Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire area. We inevitably find

that there are situations where we can't support in the localities where our members are, whether it be Wales or Ireland or wherever. So we're always looking – and Sightlines have a fantastic directory to try and find really good local support in those areas. And more often than not – I don't know what Hannah's experience is – but more often than not there are some really good local organisations out there ready and able to support.

I know Roger's going to come in on this, 'cause learning and education's a big one for him. Roger?

Roger Wilson-Hinds:

Well just a quickie. Don't forget local groups. Don't forget the peer group. There's a mass of knowledge amongst people who have got sight and hearing loss. Although they're not professional, they can share, they can learn, you can learn from each other. That's a great source of learning.

[47:30]

Radha Smith:

Great. Thanks so much, Roger and Tim. Okay, what is available to support someone with tinnitus or hearing loss who wants to listen to music? The person has previously used headphones but finding it difficult now. Jesal, would you be able to help with that?

Jesal Vishnuram:

Sure. Music is a common problem. So for anyone who has hearing loss and uses hearing aids, they are not designed to listen to music and therefore people's experience of listening to music with that is quite poor. So often people will revert to taking their hearing aids out and using headphones.

Headphones typically will just have a volume function, and making things louder doesn't necessarily make things clearer or any more enjoyable, especially when it comes to music.

On your smartphones you will find an accessibility folder. There are some features that can help personalise the sound to your hearing. So you can change the frequencies or the pitch of sound to make some things clearer than others, which can help with music.

Some headphones and ear devices, earbuds, will also have these features, so you can look out for these. And then if you are using hearing aids or cochlear implants to listen to music – because they're not designed to listen to music, however, you can have additional programmes to help make music a little bit more enjoyable – so it's always worth talking to your audiologist about doing that as well.

But as Tim mentioned, Connevans is a great place to ask for advice on different types of headphones. It's really important that you buy headphones that don't damage your hearing

further or make your tinnitus worse because any kind of noise exposure or anything that triggers your tinnitus can make it worse. So it's really important to listen to music at a safe level, which then doesn't trigger your tinnitus as well. So Connevens is a really good place to look for specific products to help.

[49:20]

Radha Smith: Thank you, Jesal. Jesal, you may have covered this. We have a question: "Is there a specific support agency that supports tinnitus sufferers?"

Jesal Vishnuram: So RNID, we do support people with tinnitus but then you also have the British Tinnitus Association, the BTA, and they do a lot of work with people with tinnitus as well. So you can contact either RNID or the BTA.

[49:45]

Radha Smith: Great. Thanks, Jesal. Okay, we have an anonymous question here. They're asking, "How safe is it to use the letter scanning or reading device on smartphones? Just wondering how secure it is to have personal letters downloaded onto the device." And they're also saying, "Be My Eyes is an excellent service. I happen to be a volunteer and have assisted several people from different parts of the world."

Hannah Rowlatt: That's fantastic. So generally speaking, the apps that I've talked about don't store the information. So they are obviously using the internet. They have to be connected to the internet for the apps to work, to identify, you know, 'cause they're using OCR, optical character recognition. But once they've captured the information and read it aloud to you it's not stored. So that's the first thing to say.

The second thing to say is in terms of using Be My Eyes, it is amazing, but I wouldn't do anything private or confidential via Be My Eyes. So that's, I guess, something else to warn people about, is that even though the service is amazing and you're speaking to volunteers, actually you don't know – they're not particularly trained or there's no confidentiality agreement or anything like that. So I would be wary of using Be My Eyes for anything confidential. But yes, generally speaking the apps don't store the data. Unless anybody else... Tim, I don't know if you...

Tim Locke: No, you're right. Obviously the AI technology that is used to be able to, for example, translate the text to speech in real time needs a server on the internet to be able to provide that facility. But it shouldn't be stored.

Hannah Rowlatt: It's not stored, no.

Tim Locke: And any information will be sent back. But I think it's a very good point about Be My Eyes. I always say with a caveat for my members, just be sensible with it. In actual fact, when you sign up as a member, indeed when you sign up as a volunteer, I do believe these caveats are very clearly explained. But you know, you don't really want to be perhaps using the tool to show your bank statements, for example.

Hannah Rowlatt: However, I would say that there has kind of very recently been launched a kind of paid-for service. So it's called Aira. So A-I-R-A, where you can subscribe to a service. And actually it's like Be My Eyes but they employ the staff who run it. So you're not speaking to volunteers. You're speaking to staff who are trained and they do have confidentiality. So if you were looking...if somebody particularly had a lot of confidential information that they were kind of worried about, then that would be a way to go in terms of Aira. You get a five-minute free call, I think, a day. But anything more than that, if you wanted them to be there with you all the time then you pay for that. It's not a free service, unlike Be My Eyes. Just another option to throw out there.

Tim Locke: I think also it might be worth mentioning about smart speakers as well. There are facilities on your Echos at home – it's a while since I've used one and set one up for somebody – but obviously it's allied to your own account. So correct me if I'm wrong, Hannah, but there are facilities to go into those accounts and to be able to delete all your conversation history if you want to.

Hannah Rowlatt: Yeah, absolutely. And you can even do that...so obviously smart speakers, this is a question that lots of people have. They're worried about their privacy, who is listening. And certainly in terms of the Amazon devices, you can actually now use your voice to ask and to change your settings in terms of how long your audio is kept. So you can choose, using your voice to set it, so that none of your audio is stored. So obviously it helps Amazon if they keep your recordings 'cause that's how they improve their responses, 'cause AI is processed that way. But yes, you do have more control over the storing of your data than you used to.

[54:02]

Radha Smith: Wonderful. Thank you so much, Hannah and Tim.

Okay, we have so many questions so I'm really sorry to everyone in the audience who won't have your question answered today. We have had a number of questions again about whether people will be able to access the recording afterwards, and yes you will if you're subscribed to Community Care Inform Adults, which everyone in the audience today

should be. Then you will be able to access the recording. There won't be a handout but you'll be able to access the recording.

Tim Locke: And just to say we're happy to obviously pick the questions up afterwards and do our best to try and answer them.

Radha Smith: Oh, that's very kind, Tim.

Hannah Rowlatt: And obviously you're welcome to contact us directly. We all have services that kind of operate, so you can obviously just get in contact with our organisations and our teams directly if you have any questions.

Radha Smith: Great. Yeah, that's a great reminder. Thanks, Hannah. I wanted to ask our presenters if anyone has any final thoughts at all.

Tim Locke: It's just been a pleasure being here today. I want to thank you, Radha, very much for emailing me a month ago to invite me and Roger along to this session, and it's been great being joined by Hannah and Jesal. I think it's a really great webinar, and I think the content is, as you can see, very, very interesting and pretty vast. But I think we've covered quite a lot there today.

Radha Smith: Great. Well thank you so much to all of our presenters – Jesal, Hannah, Tim and Roger – and thank you to Sam for providing the BSL interpretation today. And thank you to our wonderful audience. Thanks for joining us today and I hope you have a lovely rest of your day.