

New mobile app gives a voice to those with communications challenges

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For those living with aphasia, autism, and other conditions that affect speech ability, communicating with friends and loved ones can be a challenge. MyVoice, a mobile app and server system that operates on iPhone and Android devices, gives users with these conditions a voice by simply tapping words and pictures on a screen.

"People living with aphasia talk about the fear and isolation they sometimes feel because they cannot communicate as they once did," says Aphasia Researcher and postdoctoral fellow Dr. Alexandra Carling-Rowland. "MyVoice will help to increase [communication](#) confidence, participation and independence."

Launching today, MyVoice is the first assistive and augmentative communication (AAC) device to introduce location-aware vocabulary that suggests useful words and phrases based on a user's location. At Tim Horton's, for example, MyVoice instantly generates items like "Tim Bits" and "Double Double" for use in conversation.

MyVoice was developed within the Technologies for Aging Gracefully Lab (TAGlab), under the direction of Professor Ron Baecker in the Department of Computer Science. The mandate of the TAGlab is to facilitate research and development to support aging throughout the life course. The lab identifies "sweet spots" where technology seems relevant to human need, then envisions ways in which the technology could address those needs. The lab then designs and tests prototypes. The technology will be further supported through the University of Toronto

Innovations and Partnerships Office (IPO) with respect to partnerships, commercialization, and funding.

"This is an excellent example of how university research makes a direct and positive impact on the challenges that face people around the world," says Professor Paul Young, Vice President, Research at U of T. "MyVoice is just one of the many projects our Innovations and Partnerships Office is developing with U of T faculty so we can move our brilliant research from our campuses to the global marketplace."

MyVoice is dramatically more affordable than traditional speaking aids. Where traditional aids average in cost at \$12,000, MyVoice allows users to try the technology for free and upgrade to a full featured version for a \$30-monthly subscription cost.

"More than 90 per cent of people with communication challenges use primitive communication aids, or no aids at all," says MyVoice CEO, Alexander Levy. "MyVoice will always be accessible to anyone with a communication challenge."

Along with already received funding from Google, [Android](#), and NSERC, MyVoice has received requests from institutions, collaborators, and school boards to trial the technology with their constituents. The device is currently in use at a school in the Toronto District School Board.

"I was completely blown away by MyVoice," says Researcher Dr. Rhonda McEwen at the University of Toronto. "It absolutely met so many deficits I had in current research with other applications I was using." "Some children have no verbal communication. MyVoice gives them a chance to cross closer to our world, where we have words and voices."

More information: To learn more about MyVoice, visit www.myvoiceaac.com

Provided by University of Toronto

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