

# **Be my eyes – Pilot Project 2021-2022 Proposal**

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# Challenges

- The pandemic has provided a host of new challenges to community engagement for people with disabilities. Fewer people out mean fewer opportunities to ask for assistance, and more difficulty with way-finding. As well, the barriers that have gone up to help with social distancing can be confusing and difficult to navigate. More signs than ever before are on display at businesses, etc... which only adds to this confusion
- Add to this additional physical barriers like construction, snow, road closures etc... and you start to get a picture of how difficult navigating in these conditions can be for people with various disabilities.

## **We've been investigating navigation apps to assist people to move around relatively independently throughout the City**

We are piloting Blindsquare in Dundas Place. I presented this possibility to the Committee before the pandemic last year. Things were put on hold with the pandemic happening, but we are going to be piloting this shortly within that area. The area was chosen because of its lack of curbs and the fast-paced adjustments being made with changing structures/landscapes/patios due to COVID-19

However, we also got the chance to explore a new app, Be My Eyes. This technology will give us a broader opportunity to offer support and increase in navigating our City spaces

# Be My Eyes

This is a free app that pairs people with vision loss or blindness with volunteers across North America. So, if someone is looking to pick out apples at a grocery store or choose a nice shirt, or read a sign etc... they are immediately paired with a volunteer who is sighted and can assist them. It's an effective app that is well-used and generally favourably rated. However, in terms of navigation in our community we needed something a little more significant to address more serious concerns like construction, snow, and community safety

Low Stakes Tasks = volunteers

Higher Stakes Tasks = trained staff



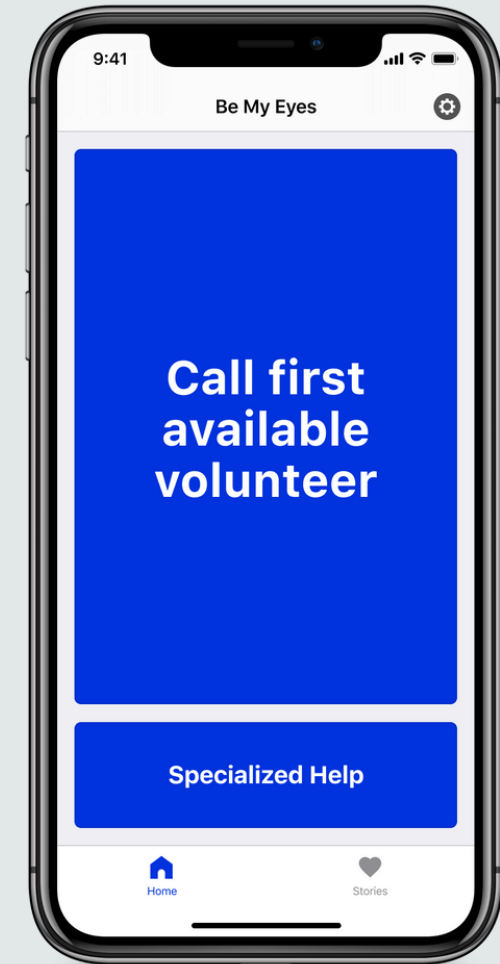
# What Counts As High Stakes Tasks?

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- We want to ensure that everyone who uses the Be My Eyes app in the City of London can get the help that they need. We recognize that some tasks need more specialized knowledge and training to be able to assist someone properly, and that is why we are proposing the institution of the Be My Eyes Specialized Service option
- High Stakes Tasks: finding a bus stop, navigating a construction zone
- Low Stakes Tasks: picking out a shirt, finding something in the house

# City of London would have “specialized help option”

- Anyone in the City would be able to click on the specialized help tab and receive directions from a specialist at the Call Centre trained in orientation and mobility in both official languages
- The specialized help option is intended for high stakes tasks only!
- App is available for both IOS and android and it is free for users to install



# CNIB & Be My Eyes Partnership

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## Be My Eyes - Volunteer

- User is connected to a volunteer somewhere in the world to provide basic sighted assistance
- Volunteers are not trained on how to provide proper guidance
- Free service for the blind and sight loss community

## Be My Eyes – Specialized Service

### User is connected to CNIB trained Agents

- Completed specialized Orientation & mobility (O&M) training
- Services provided in both official Canadian languages
- Confidentiality ensured via CNIB non-disclosure agreements
- Privacy ensured as no data is recorded or saved

### User is connected to client Contact Centre

- Calls are routed to client's customer Contact Centre to provide sighted assistance

## Be My Eyes – At Work

- Calls are connected to colleagues within the same company
- Colleagues offering sighted assistance can offer enhanced support as they have unique knowledge about the company and department.
  - Calls can be directed to specific departments
  - No data is collected or saved on BME servers
  - Data is transferred to Dashboard for evaluation

## **We're hoping to pilot the Be My Eyes Specialized Service this year**

- The cost of this service and implementation is very reasonable and can be covered by our accessibility budget
- We would be the first municipality in Canada to have the app available, which gives us a competitive edge and could be good for growing businesses in the area
- Simple to use, and it may assist with some of our social and physical challenges in the City (construction, snow, finding bus stops, safety etc...)
- This project also aligns with our Safe Cities goals by allowing vulnerable people and women and girls to have someone to virtually walk with them as they navigate the city at night



# How We All Benefit From Be My Eyes

- Be My Eyes is a useful tool for the blind and visually impaired, but if we implement it in London they won't be the only ones to benefit
- People with spatial navigation challenges will be able to use the service to check that they are at the right bus stop or are heading the right way
- Be My Eyes provides peace of mind and a set of eyes to watch over people walking alone at night, an especially useful service for the elderly and women
- It allows for seniors and those with vision loss or blindness to be more independent, which reduces stress on caregivers
- Volunteers can instruct seniors on how to complete simple online tasks or help them through smaller-scale technical issues like changing the input on the remote
- Short people or people who have dwarfism or identify as little people can use this service to see stuff that is above their line of sight, like if they are shopping
- And we know that there are many other ways to use this app! If we implement it, everyone in the community can benefit, not just people with disabilities

# Next Steps

- Working with internal staff to ensure risk-management/contract issues are addressed prior to the pilot
- Ensure thoughtful and extensive communication (which is also accessible) between the various groups and stakeholders involved in this process
- Prepare an accessible feedback mechanism so we can study and address the impact of the pilot on the community

**Questions / Concerns?**

